

Michael Chamberlain focuses on medieval Damascus to develop a new approach to the relationship between the society and culture of the Middle East. The author argues that historians have long imposed European strictures onto societies to which they were alien. Western concepts of legitimate order were inappropriate to medieval Muslim society where social advancement was dependent upon the production of knowledge and religious patronage, and it was the household, rather than the state agency or the corporation, that held political and social power. An interesting parallel is drawn between the learned elite and the warriors of Damascus who, through similar strategies, acquired status and power and passed them on in their households. By examining material from the Latin West, Sung China, and the Sinicized empires of Inner Asia, the author addresses the nature of political power in the period and places the Middle East within the context of medieval Eurasia.

Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization

Knowledge and social practice in medieval
Damascus, 1190–1350

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To my family

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Preface

It is sad but unavoidable that a single book can never pay off all the debts its production has incurred. This study began as an attempt to understand the social uses of knowledge by the learned elite of Damascus, and took me in directions I originally had no intention of pursuing. The book is aimed at a number of audiences, in part to acknowledge that it could never have been completed without borrowing from other disciplines. Having taken much from anthropologists, sociologists, comparative historians, and historians of China and the Latin West, I hope they will find something here to interest them in turn.

The notes are at the bottom of the page, not to give an impression of scholarly formidableness, but to allow the book to be read in two ways. Scholars of medieval Islamic history will notice that the notes not only are intended to support the argument, but in many cases to advance it. Scholars of other fields may read the narrative without reference to the notes.

This book, not to mention the greater part of my education, would not have been possible without my teacher Ira Lapidus. Without his example, I would have not tried to become a historian; without his guidance and support, I would never have made it thus far. I am also grateful to my teachers, William Brinner, Eugene Irschick, Hamid Algar, André Ferré, and others.

I must also thank the history departments at Berkeley, Stanford, and Wisconsin. This book would not have been possible without the support and good conversation I found in these three places. I am especially indebted to Peter Duus, Richard Roberts, and Joel Beinin for their support and encouragement at Stanford. I am also very grateful to André Wink, whose ideas entered the dissertation upon which this book is based before either of us knew we would find ourselves in Madison, and who has given me much advice and support since my arrival here.

As much as anything else, this book is a product of talks with friends, the support of friends, and thoughts about friends, so I would like to thank Rikki Allanna Zrimsek, Irène Keller, Margaret O'Brien, Lisa Saper, Margaret Malamud, Wendy Verlaine, Mia Fuller, James Ketelaar, David McDonald, Mary Conn, Peter Flood, Holly Huprich, and Brendan Phipps. To Krystyna

von Henneberg, who helped me through the dissertation upon which this book is based, I owe more than space allows me to express.

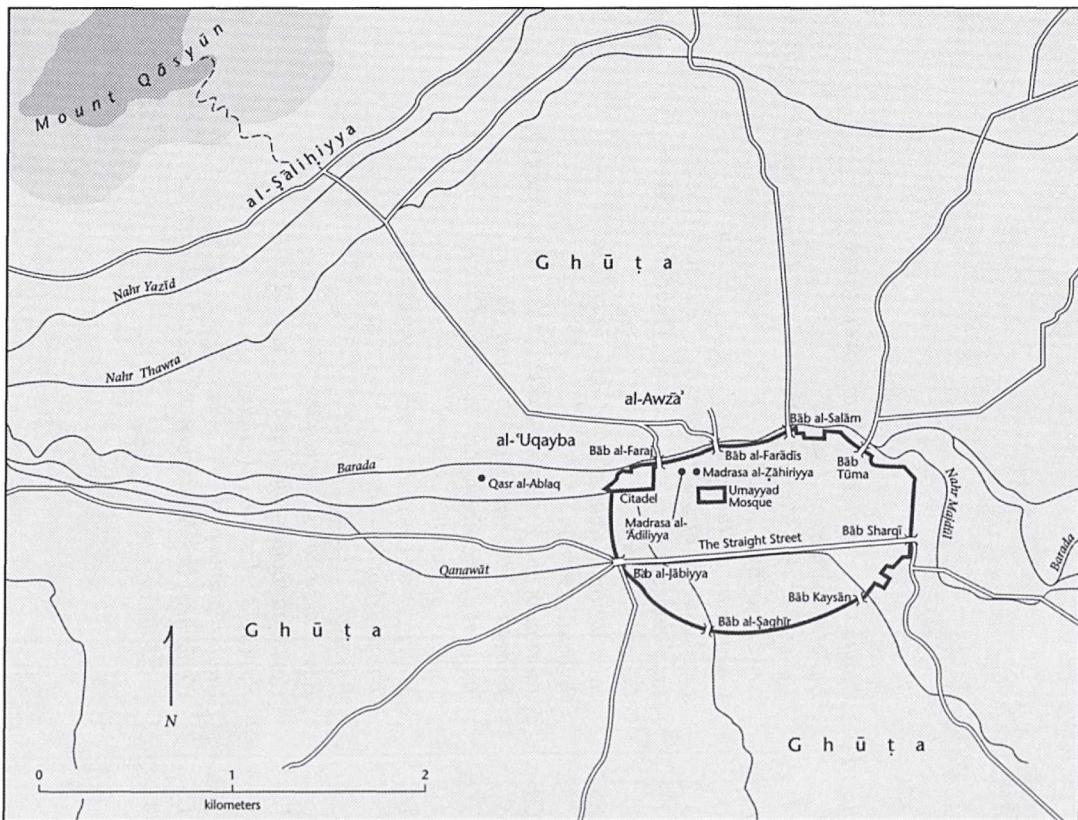
I would also like to thank readers of various versions of the manuscript, who pointed out errors and infelicities and suggested new ways of thinking about these problems and presenting them: Richard Bulliet, William Courtenay, Patricia Crone, Dale Eickelman, Jan Heesterman, Krystyna von Henneberg, Anatoly Khazanov, David McDonald, Margaret Sommerville, André Wink, Lynne Withey, and the readers for the Press whose names are unknown to me. I am much appreciative of the efforts my editors, Marigold Acland and Mary Starkey, have put into the production of the book. It goes without saying that all errors are my own. Also many thanks to the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*, where some of these ideas were first presented.

The libraries in which I have worked, and where I have always been happy, include the University of California, Stanford University, the Hoover Institution, the University of Wisconsin, Cambridge University, the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Vatican Library, and the Süleymaniye, Köprülü, and Topkapi libraries in Istanbul. To the staff of the Köprülü, where often I worked long periods alone, I am especially grateful for many small kindnesses. To the people in Damascus and Aleppo who have helped me with this project, and shown me so much kindness, I have not the words to express my gratitude. I am also grateful to Donald Little for supplying me with microfilms of manuscripts that have been withdrawn from circulation in Istanbul. Finally, I can hardly express enough my thanks to Jacqueline Sublet and the Institut pour l'histoire et la recherche des textes, both for their kindly reception and their incomparable collection of microfilmed manuscripts.

For the money that supported this project I thank the US taxpayer (trebly), the Mellon Foundation (doubly), the Graduate School at Berkeley, The Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (doubly), and the Middle East Study Center of the University of California and the history department at Stanford (both multiply).

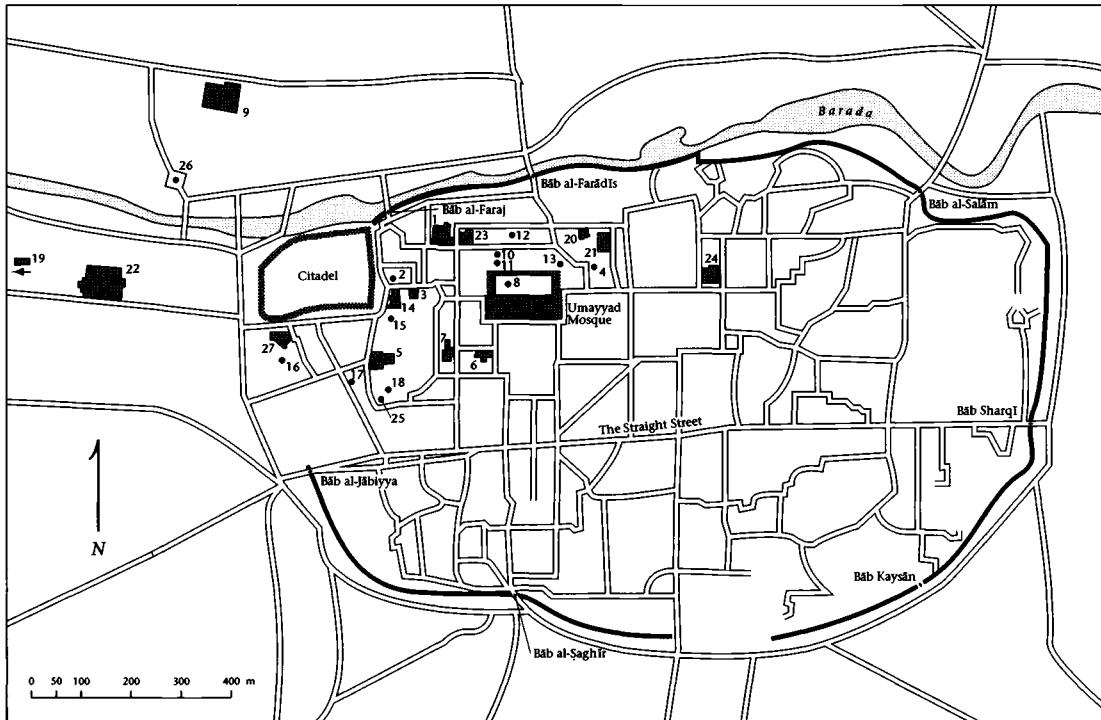
Abbreviations

<i>Annales: ESC</i>	<i>Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations</i>
<i>BEO</i>	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London</i>
<i>CSSH</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>EI (1)</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st edn. (Leiden, 1913–38)</i>
<i>EI (2)</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edn. (Leiden, 1954–)</i>
<i>IC</i>	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Institute in Egypt</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>MIFD</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'Institut Français de Damas</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Muslim World</i>
<i>RAA</i>	<i>Revue des Arts Asiatiques</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Revue des études Islamiques</i>
<i>REMMM</i>	<i>Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Revista degli studi orientale</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>



1 Damascus and its surrounding region

Compiled by Sara Arscott, from N. Eliseeff, *La Description de Damas d'Ibn'Asikir* (Damascus, 1959).



Legend

- 1 al-Ādiliyya al-Kubrā
- 2 al-Nūriyya / al-Imādiyya
- 3 Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Nūriyya
- 4 al-Duwlā'iyya
- 5 Nūr al-Dīn's Hospital
- 6 al-Amīniyya
- 7 al-Mujāhidīyya
- 8 al-Ghazāliyya
- 9 al-Shāmiyya al-Barrāniyya
- 10 al-Āzīziyya
- 11 Tomb of Saladin
- 12 al-Taqawīyya
- 13 al-Rawāhiyya
- 14 al-Ashrafiyya
- 15 al-Qaymāziyya
- 16 al-Adhrā'wiyya
- 17 al-Šārimīyya
- 18 al-Shāmiyya al-Juwāniyya
- 19 al-İzziyya al-Barrāniyya
- 20 al-Nāṣirīyya al-Barrāniyya
- 21 al-Bādhārā'iyya
- 22 Mosque and Tomb of Tankiz
- 23 al-Zāhirīyya al-Barrāniyya
- 24 al-Qaymāriyya
- 25 Tomb of Umm Ṣalīḥ
- 26 Horse Market
- 27 Dār al-Suāda (palace)

2 Damascus in the thirteenth century

Introduction

General statement of the problem

This book is about the social uses of learning in high medieval Damascus. The topic offers an opportunity to address two problems that historians of the period have puzzled over but not resolved.

The first arises out of the methodologies Western historians have applied to high medieval Islamic societies. Over the last two generations a number of historians have applied various methodologies of European social and institutional history to the period. The medieval Middle East would appear to be a suitable object of these approaches. The apparently undivided sovereignty of its rulers, the role of law in the regulation of its social life, the relatively high monetization of its economies, the existence of bureaucracies and large urban garrisons of standing armies – collectively these give the high medieval Middle East the characteristics of a highly complex and urban society on a par with early modern Europe. It should be not surprising perhaps that appearing frequently in studies of the period are familiar entities such as “government,” “the state,” “higher education,” “the army,” “bureaucracy,” and “administration.” Notions such as “dynastic legitimacy” and the distinction between the private and public spheres also find their way into the field. Historians often employ these concepts casually, but uncritical use has often put the field in danger of anachronism and confusion. Another problem with this approach is that it often leads historians to use “corruption,” “usurpation,” and “illegitimacy” as explanatory devices when the entities and institutions they study do not function as expected.

Several recent historians have acknowledged that the formal objects of social and institutional history have often eluded us. The most sensitive accounts of the period have stressed the informality of social practices and groups, while others have described informal analogues to the permanent hierarchical institutions and social bodies characteristic of other medieval societies. This notion of informality is useful to the extent that it distinguishes the high medieval Middle East from societies that had permanent hierarchical institutions and groups. But the observation is largely negative. It does little

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but reiterate that the high medieval Middle East was not characterized by some of the structural characteristics of some other Eurasian societies of the period. Also, in its implicit comparison to Europe, the focus on informality has often concentrated less on what was there than what was not. This first problem led to the principal issue that this book seeks to address. In looking for the defining possibilities and constraints on culture, social life, and politics, can we be satisfied with describing either the “corruption” of the formal institutions of other societies or their “informal” analogues?

The second problem concerns the evidence that has come down to us from the high medieval Middle East. The period is rich in sources. It also had abundant supplies of cheap paper, a dry climate, and administrative traditions stretching back to late antiquity. However, in spite of conditions conducive to the production and preservation of document collections comparable to those of the Latin West, the period is surprisingly poor in original document collections. George Duby's memoirs might tempt medieval Islamic historians to lament the past's unfairness to the field.¹ To the ten thousand original documents Duby exploited from the archive of the Abbey of Cluny alone a historian of the high medieval Middle East might counterpose a much smaller number from some very large empires.

Given the small number of original documents that have survived from the high medieval Middle East, and the inadequacy of concepts derived from European historiography, it might seem reasonable to question whether a social history of the period is possible at all. The point of departure of this study is the similarity between the historiographical and conceptual problems. Where the sociological emphasis has been on the “lack” of formal institutions and group structures, the historiographical problem has been to grapple with the “scarcity” of original document collections. Given that in both cases the somewhat artificial standard of comparison is Europe, a reexamination of the methods of social history as applied to the Middle East might lead to new perspectives on these lasting problems.

The line of inquiry that this study proposes is to examine the practices by which power and status were acquired, exerted, and asserted. In the high medieval Middle East, this study will argue, it was the elite household (*bayt*, pl. *buyūt*), and not the state, the agency, or the autonomous corporate or religious body, that held power, and that exercised it in most of its social, political, cultural, and economic aspects. When we compare the medieval Middle East with other Eurasian societies of the period, a more productive approach is to examine the practices by which powerful households acquired power and prestige and passed them on to their descendants. Studying the practices of the patriarchal household – “economy” in the Aristotelian sense – also brings together various fields that historians have dealt with as separate conceptual

¹ G. Duby, *L'histoire continue* (Paris, 1991), 37.

unities.² Attention to the strategies of households rather than the taxonomy of formal institutions also helps us compare the Middle East with other societies without treating Europe as a privileged standard. It also helps us to understand how the exercise of power in the period formed the inescapable environment of elite households, both civilian and military, and shaped their strategies within it in similar ways.

This approach in turn allows us to examine the surviving “literary” sources in a new light. If we ask how elite strategies of survival made use of writing, we can exploit in a new way those written materials that were preserved in large numbers. Is the relative scarcity of collections of original documents due to accidental (and therefore unproblematic) loss, or to another reason that we have overlooked? If archival administrative, household, or corporate documents survived only in small numbers, what accounts for the preservation of the large number of sources, especially the biographical dictionaries, that social historians have seen as “literary” and “formulaic”? Why were these sources composed, stored, and preserved? What ends did the effort and money invested in these materials serve?

This book is an exploratory essay that works out these two problems together. It ceases lamenting the absence of original documents, or squeezing what can be got out of the small number that have survived. Rather, this study interprets the surviving “literary” sources as a means of understanding the cultural practices by which households attempted to survive in time. By reading these sources in this way, we come to understand issues that have long eluded medieval Islamic historians. How did our subjects imagine the nature of the social universe and maneuver within it? How did households acquire status and power and hold onto them over time? In the absence of stable and hierarchical institutions, how are we to understand the exercise of power in the period? The interior of the household was defined by the silence that respected its sacred and untouchable character. However, our sources, often written by members of these households, and many more describing the careers of their members in some detail, give us a unique if oblique view into how households survived in the larger world. This study will attempt to show that these elusive, “formulaic,” and literary sources were not merely spared the accidents that somehow befell other more “serious” sources, but rather that they should be interpreted as repositories of the practices by which households survived over generations.

By using these sources to understand how elite households made use of cultural practices for social ends, we accomplish three things. First, we begin to exploit the sources that are available to us in a more critical and productive manner. Second, we may compare the medieval Middle East to other agrarian

² See O. Brunner, *Neue Wege der Sozialgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1956), 7–32 for the development of the Aristotelian concept of “economics” out of household management.

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civilizations of medieval Eurasia with greater sensitivity – though this study will suggest more than it settles in this respect. And finally we can reach a more precise understanding of the accurate though non-specific notion of the “informality” of high medieval Islamic societies.

Social survival in the high medieval Middle East

European observers of the medieval Middle East have long been interested in, and often horrified by, the precarious conditions of social survival of its elites. Beginning in the early modern period, and continuing into the present, European writers have searched the Middle East for the mechanisms which reproduced European feudal, aristocratic, or bourgeois society. Failing to find what they expected, many have experienced the Middle East as the nightmarish reversal of the European social order.³

In a subjective sense these writers were correct. There is no doubting the rarity in the Middle East of the formal mechanisms of transmitting status that Europeans have prized.⁴ Civilian elite (a‘yān) households could not make use of such European institutions as inherited rights, immunities, franchises, charters, deeds, titles or patents of nobility or office, or hereditary privileges. Nor could the a‘yān restrict their status to small groups through the cultural strategies of elite groups elsewhere. They had little of the “natural” taste and “good breeding” of hereditary aristocracies, nor the ideology of bureaucrats and professional associations. Moreover, unlike elites in the Ottoman empire or Sung China, to mention just two examples, they were unable to insert themselves into state agencies to acquire or transmit elite status. As the a‘yān “lacked” these legal, corporate, or state mechanisms of household survival, there seems little reason to reject the traditional European perception of them as the “servants” or “slaves” of despots, and of the social order generally as either “despotic,” “disorderly,” or “corrupt.”

³ See for a classic example de Montesquieu, who believed that the absence of private property and a hereditary nobility in the Middle East were the determining characteristics of “Oriental despotism,” C.-L. de Montesquieu, *L'esprit des Lois*, vol. I (Paris, 1867), 64–5. Also N. Daniel, *Islam, Europe, and Empire* (Edinburgh, 1966), 3–18, 30; A. Grosrichard, *Les Structures du sérail, la fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris, 1979); P. S. Springborg, “The Contractual State. Reflections on Oriental Despotism,” *History of Political Thought*, 8, no. 3 (Winter, 1987), esp. 414–31; Springborg, *Western Republicanism and Oriental Despotism* (Austin, TX, 1992); L. Valensi, *Venise et la Sublime Porte. La Naissance du despote* (Paris, 1987).

⁴ As it has become common scholarly usage, I use the term a‘yān to refer to civilian elites, and in the case of Damascus in the period those civilians who were capable of competing for stipendiary posts (*mansabs*) through their acquired learning and manners. The use of the term should be qualified, however, even as it retains its descriptive utility. The sources for Damascus and elsewhere could refer to both civilians and warriors as a‘yān (the a‘yān al-umara for example); and civilian elites had a number of other terms denoting their conviction of their superiority over others: *khāṣṣa* (“elect”), *akābir* (“great”), *ashrāf*, and many others. The absence of a single and specific term for elite status is another indication that Damascus was not a society with estates or formal grades of rank. But with these reservations I will use the term for simplicity’s sake and to conform to standard usage.

However, what this perception fails to account for is the successful survival of a[‘]yān households throughout the high medieval Middle East. In Damascus (which added to these apparent impediments to social reproduction a number of its own) some households transmitted their status from the early sixth/twelfth century to well beyond the middle of the eighth/fourteenth. Many others passed on their status more modestly but just as certainly for two or three generations. This book asks how these households, living in a turbulent period, able to control property only with difficulty, made use of cultural practices associated with knowledge (*‘ilm*) in their strategies of social survival.

Knowledge, cultural capital, and social survival

Long before contemporary scholars began to look at knowledge as the “cultural capital” of elites, medieval Muslim writers associated knowledge with social survival. “The capital of the student,” wrote Ibn Jamā‘a, “is his thoughts.”⁵ Ibn al-Hājj also linked money and knowledge as forms of social capital: “knowledge (*‘ilm*) will protect you, while you have to protect your money. Knowledge judges others while money is adjudicated. Money decreases when it is spent, while knowledge is accounted as alms when it is dispensed.”⁶ As much as their “treasures of knowledge, not of gold” the words by which they represented themselves – *‘ulamā’* (“learned”), *ahl al-‘ilm* (“people of knowledge”) – affirmed their association of status with knowledge.⁷

Yet, as critical as understanding the social uses of knowledge is, how a[‘]yān households made use of learning in their strategies of social survival remains an open question. This is not due to any lack of interest in the subject of learning broadly defined. Since the Middle Ages, European scholars have studied Islamic scholastic, philosophical, scientific, and legal literatures, and a large and ever-growing body of scholarship on these subjects has appeared since. More recently intellectual historians have studied the lives and works of

⁵ Ibn Jamā‘a, *Tadhkira al-sāmi‘ wa al-mutakallim* (Beirut, 1974), 72. Metaphors associating learning with capital or money are a commonplace in the sources. See for example the shaykh who “spent all he had in the coffers of his knowledge” (mā ‘indahu min khazāna ‘ilmīhi), Şafadī, *A‘yān al-‘Aṣr*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Atif Effendi MS 1809, 623b; also ibid., 57b; Abū Shāmā, *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa al-sābi‘ al-māruf bi al-dhayl al-rawdatayn* (Beirut, 1974), 41. Knowledge was prized as the “inheritance of the prophets,” in ḥadīth, ditties, and commonplaces: Subkī, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, preuss. Kulturbesitz Or. 8, no. 1440, fol. 33: “wa-lā irth ilā shir‘a Ahmād.” Ignorance was occasionally referred to as being “short of merchandise in *‘ilm*” (qalil al-biḍā‘a fi *‘ilm*): Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya fi al-tārīkh* (repr., Beirut, 1982), 14/123; for similar metaphors see Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 14; Şafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-al-wāfiyāt*, H. Ritter et al. eds., *Das Bibliographische Lexicon* (Istanbul, 1931-), 18/396. See also Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta‘līm al-muta‘allam ṭarīq al-tā’allum* (Beirut, 1981), 39; Ibn al-Hājj, *Madkhal al-shar‘ al-sharīf*, 4 vols. in 2 (Cairo, 1929), 1/87; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Tarājim Ibn Taymiyya*, British Library Or. MS 7714, fol. 11.

⁶ Ibn al-Hājj, *Madkhal*, 1/69.

⁷ For “treasures of knowledge, not of gold” (kunūz al-‘ilm lā adh-dhahab) see Şafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/342.

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exemplary scholars or important movements. They have been joined by institutional historians, who have traced the origins and diffusion of institutions related to the transmission of knowledge.

Social historians have also been interested in the *a'yān*, for a variety of reasons. The *a'yān* were the authors of our sources, which reflect their lives and concerns. The learned elite were also judges (*qādīs*), teachers, and communal leaders. Ira Lapidus has analyzed the social roles of the learned elite to criticize the notion that “Oriental despotism” atomized cities into isolated groups incapable of cooperating with one another.⁸ Historians following Lapidus have looked to the *‘ulamā’* to explain how a precarious social equilibrium was maintained in the face of ethnic and religious diversity and contradictory interests.⁹ Lapidus, Joan Gilbert, and Carl Petry have analyzed how the *‘ulamā’* mediated among military and ruling elites, merchants, artisans, and the common people; how they carried out administrative and judicial functions in the absence of bureaucratic state agencies; and how they ensured continuity from generation to generation in unsettled societies.¹⁰

However, even though a large body of literature has appeared on Islamic intellectual, legal, and institutional history, and a smaller one on the social functions of the learned elite in cities, these approaches have been less concerned with understanding how the *a'yān* used knowledge for social and political ends. Legal and intellectual historians have considered social-historical questions to be on the margins of their central concerns. When they have studied the social aspects of knowledge, they have wanted to understand the contexts or origins of important ideas, and not the social and political uses of knowledge in historical time in specific places. Institutional historians, I will argue below, have often mistaken practices of social competition for institutional structures. Both groups have also seen the *‘ulama’* as a natural and unproblematic social category throughout Islamic history, and have often been insensitive to local and temporal variations.

Social historians have been more alert to the specific character of the groups that referred to themselves as the *a'yān* or *‘ulamā’*. However, because these historians have been largely concerned with the *‘ulamā’*’s social roles, they have emphasized the learned elite’s relational characteristics vis-à-vis other groups. The *a'yān*’s intrinsic properties, their struggles with one another, how they made use of their learning and cultivation in social competition, all remain open issues.

Even though historians have long been interested in the study of learning

⁸ I. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 1–8, 185–91.

⁹ R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur* (Cambridge, MA, 1972); Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*; C. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1981); C. Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, J. Jones-Williams trans. (London, 1968); R. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, 1980).

¹⁰ Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 107–15, 130–42, 189–90; Petry, *The Civilian Elite*, 321–3; J. Gilbert, “The ‘Ulama’ of Medieval Damascus and the International World of Islamic Scholarship,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1977), 144.

and in the social functions of the ‘ulamā’, we have yet to investigate relations between universal cultural practices and particular social strategies. This book is an inquiry into how the a‘yān of Damascus, over a 160-year period in the high Middle Ages, acquired and made use of knowledge in their strategies of social survival. By studying the social uses of knowledge, my aim is to raise and address a number of central problems in the social and cultural history of the high medieval Middle East. How did a‘yān households reproduce themselves in time? How did they defend themselves from predation by warriors? By what means did the a‘yān gain their useful loyalties and cultural distinction? What were the practices by which they competed with one another? How did they imagine the nature of the social universe and plot their trajectories within it? The answers to these questions, this study will suggest, lie not in the social, legal, and institutional structures and processes that have long attracted scholarly attention.¹¹ Nor can they be described satisfactorily as “informal” or “personal” without draining them of their particularity and complexity. Rather, these problems are better addressed by interpreting the social uses in historical time of cultural practices that scholars have often seen as universally “Islamic,” and without particular social uses.

Much of this study will cover what may appear to be well-trodden territory. The cultural practices that this book will examine are nearly universal in pre-modern Islamic societies, indeed in literate agrarian societies in general. Lecturing, reading, writing, reproducing texts, debating, discipleship, and scholarly friendship seem so widespread as to be marginal to the interests of social historians. These practices and relationships were similar to, and often influenced by, ancient rhetorical education, medieval scholasticism, and medieval Jewish education. It is not surprising therefore that scholars have studied the production of knowledge in the context of the history of education: in other places, it is where practices related to the production of knowledge often converge. However, in the case of Damascus I hope to show that we have often misinterpreted these practices precisely by studying them as “educational.” In Damascus, cultural practices associated with the production of knowledge had different meanings and uses. Placing these practices in their correct context reveals much about broader and unresolved issues concerning power, culture, and social relations.

This study focuses on the a‘yān in part because the sources on them are better than on the social history of other groups such as the warrior elite and (to a much greater extent) the common people. However, a‘yān households can be studied not only to advance our understanding of medieval Islamic scholarship, or the ‘ulamā’ as a social category, but also to address relations among power, culture, and social life on a more general level. Modern scholars

¹¹ See I. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd. edn. (Cambridge, 1984), xiv–xv; Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 1–7 for two social historians who have turned to the study of culture and manners broadly defined as critical not only in themselves, but also as a means of understanding these other domains.

have generally drawn a hard and fast distinction between warrior elites (*amīrs*) and the *a'yān*, and have seen their relationships to one another as a division of social and political labor.¹² However, this book will show how both *amīrs* and *a'yān* had similar relations to rulers, similar forms of social and political competition, and imagined the social and political universes in similar ways. In particular, as I shall show in the following chapters, many of the cultural practices we have taken to be “educational” in the case of the *a'yān* had much wider uses, and often characterized military households as well. We will also see, to the extent possible, how the common people made use of these practices. By using the limited information available on the common people, I hope both to question the extent to which these cultural practices were monopolized by the elite and to ask how universal practices were contested by particular groups.

In order to arrive at this argument the book will first devote a number of pages to discussing the nature of political power in Damascus, in the Middle East as a whole, and in the wider context of Eurasian history in the period. Two central concepts of the argument are what may be termed the “maladroit patrimonialism” of high medieval Middle Eastern rulers; and its relationship to “*fitna*,” or struggle, sometimes violent and sometimes not, carried out without reference to the “state” or interference from it. *Fitna* is a term with so many meanings that it should be discussed at the outset. Its meanings in the classical Arabic lexicons and in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth include “disorder,” “civil war,” “factional competition,” “sedition,” “madness,” “temptation,” and the sexual attractiveness of women, in all cases implying either a threat to legitimate order or a collapse into social, political, psychological, or sexual disorder. What this study hopes to accomplish is to demonstrate that while *fitna* was indeed feared as dangerously divisive and destructive, in concert with maladroit patrimonialism it remained nonetheless the inescapable environment and indeed the fundamental dynamic of politics and social life.

By examining the relationship of maladroit patrimonialism to *fitna* we can understand the distinctive and often misunderstood character of high medieval Middle Eastern politics. Rulers lived in cities and recognized few impediments to seizing the wealth of others. Rulers also had the power to redistribute status and revenue sources continuously. However, we cannot consider them “despots” in any real sense of the term. Rulers had no monopoly of coercive force. Throughout the period under consideration, rulers never had the knowledge, the agencies, and the independent coercive power to coordinate and control the subordinate elites upon whom they depended to rule. Rather, power was diffused among the households of powerful *amīrs* and *a'yān*. Rulers were dependent on the same households – of

¹² The most influential study in this respect is M.G.S. Hodgson's discussion of the “dividing up of power,” in the “*a'yān-amīr* system,” *The Venture of Islam. Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. II: *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago, 1974), 64–9, 91–4, esp. 64.

both a‘yān and amīrs – whom they regularly subjugated to predation. Thus the peculiar character of high medieval Middle Eastern politics. The dynamic tension in high medieval Middle Eastern cities such as Damascus was between the diffusion of power and revenue sources among elite households on the one hand; and the physical propinquity of rulers, their ability to reassign revenue sources, and the relative absence of restraints on their seizure of property on the other. This tension is what gives fitna its explanatory utility.

Two major spheres of a‘yān social life – what we have formalized as “higher education” and the “suppression of heresy” – were both experienced by our subjects as arenas of fitna. In both cases they experienced fitna within the domain of knowledge much as amīrs did within the domain of war. This study will suggest that we look beyond the formal, public, and legalistic aspects of power and social life, and try instead to understand their abiding possibilities and constraints. By studying the competitive practices of fitna as exercised by both amīrs and a‘yān, we come to understand on a more general level what historians have formalized as the distinct spheres of “society,” “culture,” and the “state.” We can also undermine the anachronistic notion of the existence of “state” and “society” as distinct entities, and of political and social competition as the separate domains of amīrs and a‘yān respectively. Fitna, as we shall see in the course of this study, was not the temporary breakdown of a preexisting legitimate order, but in concert with maladroit patrimonialism formed the central dynamic of all elite social and political life. It imposed its logic on most of their political and social relationships.

Approaches to culture and society in the medieval Middle East

When Western scholars have studied medieval Middle Eastern peoples, they have brought with them an implicit theory, often a deterministic one, of relations between culture and social life. Europeans have long taken Islam as a historically transcendent object of inquiry. The constitution of Islam as a historical object began with the earliest European descriptions of the Middle East. Beginning with the crusades, and continuing into the present, it has often been Islam that “explains” the terrifying, pathetic, or exemplary otherness of Middle Eastern peoples.¹³ When we think about the “feudal” Latin West or “imperial” China it is an attribute of their political organization that we seize upon as emblematic of what is most important about them. But the words by which scholars represent the medieval Middle East – the Islamic World, Islam, Islamdom, the Muslim World – reveal how Western scholars have continued to take religious culture to represent the Middle East. Even today, a glance at journal or course titles will reveal the degree to which this concentration on religion continues to dominate the field.

¹³ See M. Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, R. Veinus trans. (Seattle, 1987), 3–48, 60–71.

Like many generalizations, this focus on Islam both hides and reveals a truth. There is no doubt that many people in the pre-modern Middle East understood power and collective life with reference to the sacred, more so perhaps than is true of some other pre-modern societies. The *a'yān* of medieval Middle Eastern societies styled themselves – and in our period supported themselves – as a religious elite. Rulers and warriors explained their strategies and sometimes understood them in religious terms. Moreover, the sources were shaped by a religious sensibility when they were not religious in intent, and cannot be interpreted without an understanding of their religious content.

However, having registered the importance of religion as an object of study, giving Islam the priority it has had brings with it several drawbacks. First, this approach has often obliterated differences among Middle Eastern societies that are distinct in other respects. Islamicists have looked for continuities among societies as different as the seventh-century Hijāz, ninth-century Baghdađ, and fourteenth-century Damascus, and have often enshrined correspondences among them as truths about a single historical object. In addition, the Islamicist approach has tended to focus attention on origins (of ideas, groups, religious practices, etc.) as a category of historical explanation. Finally, by failing to situate relations between culture and society in specific historical contexts, the Islamicist approach has occasionally lapsed into an essentialism, one that seeks to explain all behavior with reference to a single cultural construct. Ignoring what it dismisses as local or pathological variations on a universal theme, or taking local practices as evidence for universal structures, this approach has regularly effaced the specific character of the societies it examines. It rarely asks how culture becomes a stake or a weapon in specific struggles. In short, Islamicist studies of the pre-modern Middle East have often erased differences among Middle Eastern societies, while constructing artificial and often misleading differences with Europe.

Recent studies of relations between society and culture have tried to escape the occasional universalism and essentialism of this approach. One strategy has been to bring to the study of the medieval Middle East some of the concepts and methods of European social and institutional history. A number of monographs have examined cities, bureaucracies, institutions of justice and social control, cultural institutions such as *madrasas* ("law colleges") and *khanqāhs* (*śūfi* "convents"), groups such as sectarian communities, men's associations (*futuwwas* and *ahdāth*), legal schools (*madhhabs*), *śūfi* orders, and legal and administrative phenomena such as *waqf* (charitable foundation) and *iqṭā'* (temporary land grant). These studies have put the historiography of the high medieval Middle East on a more self-conscious and comparative basis.

However, as promising as such approaches seemed at the outset, they have not worked as well as their proponents expected. The most sensitive studies of the period have realized that formal entities, agencies, institutions, and groups did not determine social relations in the medieval Middle East to the extent

they did in the Latin West. Studies of formal entities have advanced only partial explanations of the nature of political and social power, of how a‘yān households reproduced the conditions of their elite status, how they passed on their status and wealth to their descendants, how they constructed and imagined their social ties, and how they competed among themselves and against others. Where social historians began by calling into question some of the anachronistic assumptions of earlier Islamicist scholarship, some of their most important conclusions have been largely negative: formal entities and institutions did not determine social life in the expected manner. By lamenting the “corruption” or positing “informal” analogues to “formal” European practices and entities, we have yet to disengage from ideas we have learned to distrust.

The problem for historians is that after having taken terminology, methods, and concepts from European social history, we have often failed to question their applicability to societies outside Europe. When we attempt to describe a society so distant in time, the first task is to understand Europe’s historiographical practices in relation to Europe’s own practices of domination and social reproduction. When it has failed to take these fundamental differences into consideration, the modern historiography of the medieval Middle East has often imposed European social ideals on societies that cannot sustain them.

The problem of evidence

A similar problem arises when we look at the application of European methods of exploiting historical evidence to Islamic social history. If there is any medieval Middle Eastern city that seems open to the practices of social history, it is Damascus. There is perhaps more literary, epigraphic, and material evidence on Damascus in the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods than on any other city of the high medieval Middle East, with the possible exception of Cairo. Travelers’ accounts, chronicles, biographical dictionaries, buildings, street plans, inscriptions, coins, manuals for clerks and secretaries, and treatises on every aspect of intellectual life exist in large numbers. Damascus was also fortunate, from the perspective of historians, in having several generations of local historians and biographers. It would seem that the abundance, variety, and detail of the sources make Damascus an ideal subject for social historians.

Yet in the midst of apparent plenty, social and cultural historians of Damascus – together with historians of other cities of the medieval Middle East – have found the sources impoverished on many of the questions they most wanted to answer. The chronicles and biographical dictionaries convey little information on several of the critical problems that historians have tried to address, while these sources carry masses of information that historians have seen as marginal to their interests. Failing to find the desired information

on the social functions of structures and groups, and deluged by what seem to be anomalous or useless anecdotes, scholars of the period have often concluded with some reluctance that these sources are “austere,” “stereotypical,” or “formulaic.”¹⁴ Given the deficiencies of the sources with respect to the critical questions of social history, some scholars have doubted whether a social history of the high medieval Middle East is possible at all. Damascus, although it possesses sources in greater quantity than most other cities, has posed many of the same intractable problems as other cities of the period.

There are several possible strategies that historians might adopt in the face of the difficult nature of the evidence for high medieval Islamic societies. One, already long essayed, has been to sift through the standard sources for their information on social, political, cultural, or economic groups and institutions. While much important work remains to be done, few surprises are to be expected from this approach, and crucial questions remain that it cannot address.

A second strategy is that adopted most notably and successfully by Joan Gilbert for high medieval Damascus and Carl Petry for late medieval Cairo.¹⁵ Gilbert and Petry tabulated the quantifiable information in the biographical dictionaries to address a number of questions about the social origins and composition of civilian elite groups. These scholars have shown that patient handling and sensitive interpretation of serial data can produce important conclusions regarding the affiliations, composition, and social origins of the civilian elite. They have also argued persuasively that accurate prosopographical data can be extracted from the ever-problematic biographical dictionaries. However, in addressing several critical issues, this approach has pointed to others which by its nature it cannot settle. How did the *a'yān* understand their relationship to the social world? What were their strategies for reproducing the conditions of their elite status? By what institutions, codes, and practices did they struggle for power, wealth, and prestige among themselves and against others? These are questions that elude study by quantitative methods even though they may benefit from them.

A final strategy has been the intensive exploitation of the few original documents that have survived from the period. We know that in this highly literate period large numbers of petitions, decrees, contracts, *qādī*-records (records of judges’ opinions), wills, estate inventories, and administrative documents were drawn up. However, few of these have survived in the original.

¹⁴ On the biographical dictionaries see R. Bulliet, “A Quantitative Approach to Medieval Muslim Biographical Dictionaries,” *JESHO* 13 (1970), 195–211; Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, xi–xiii; H.A.R. Gibb, “Islamic Biographical Literature,” in B. Lewis and P.M. Holt eds., *Historians of the Middle East* (Oxford, 1962), 54–8; I. Hafsi, “Recherches sur le genre ‘Tabaqat’ dans la littérature arabe,” *Arabica* 23 (1976), 228–65; 24 (1977), 1–41, 150–86; R.S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: a Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, 1991), 188–92.

¹⁵ C. Petry, *The Civilian Elite*; Gilbert, “The ‘Ulama.’” See also R.W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Middle Period. An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), for a wide-ranging discussion of quantitative approaches to the biographical dictionaries.

Scholars have long regretted this absence of major document collections from the high medieval Middle East. Many scholars, it is fair to say, believe that it is the rarity of documentary evidence that is responsible for the wide gaps in our knowledge of the social history of the period.¹⁶ Some scholars have also lamented that medieval Middle Eastern historiography has lagged behind other fields because of the small number of original documents that have survived from the period. In part because of the rarity of original documents, historians of the high medieval period have given those documents that have been found ever-growing attention, and have placed ever-growing hopes in them.¹⁷ Exploiting original documents, however few in number they may be, has several apparent advantages. Countering the charge that historians of the medieval Middle East privilege literary sources, the study of documents has promised to put the field on the road to historiographical legitimacy. It also has promised to shed new light on issues that other sources obscure or ignore.

Yet as obvious as it might seem for historians to privilege collections of original documents, here too the results have been mixed. Even the most active proponents of original documents have recognized that the number of surviving documents is much smaller than is the case for the high and late medieval Latin West, Sung China, or the Ottoman empire, to take just three examples, and that the uses historians may put them to are more limited still. But one question we have yet to ask is whether document collections had uses in the high medieval Middle East comparable to their uses in these other societies. Is accidental loss the reason that historians have so few original document collections from the high medieval Middle East?

One way to address this problem is to compare the uses of collections of original documents in the high medieval Middle East with other societies in which documents have survived in larger numbers. The collection of original documents has a privileged status in European historiography in part because it has a privileged status in European social and political competition. In the Latin West documents were unmistakable proofs of privilege, exemption, competence, precedent, honor, or possession. As nations, classes, corporations, religious bodies, families, status groups, and factions fought out their struggles with documents, they took measures to preserve them. This accounts in part for the survival of a large number of collections of original documents from high medieval Europe compared to the high medieval Middle East. The critical position of the document within European social and political competition also shaped the development of modern European historiography. When European historians began to exploit original documents, it was often to examine such symbolic charters to subvert or assert inherited rights,

¹⁶ See for examples E. Ashtor, *The Medieval Near East: Social and Economic History* (London, 1978), esp. 1; C. Cahen, *Introduction à l'histoire du monde musulman médiéval, VIIe-XVe siècle: méthodologie et éléments de bibliographie* (Paris, 1983), 51.

¹⁷ As Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 40, puts it, "documentary materials are quickly moving from the periphery to the center of historical thinking in the Islamic field." See also Cahen, *Introduction*, 51–82.

autonomy, sovereignty, titles, and ownership. Collections of documents therefore survived in greater numbers not by accident, but because elite groups exerted themselves to preserve them. And the crucial role of documents in European historiography is in like manner grounded in European practices of social and political competition.

In the high medieval Middle East, however, rulers maintained patrimonial if not absolutist claims, considered most of the wealth of their subjects their own, and permitted other social bodies none of the formal autonomies they had in Europe. Individuals, households, religious bodies, and groups did not brandish documents as proofs of hereditary status, privilege, or property to the extent they did in the Latin West. Nor were their strategies of social reproduction recorded, sanctified, or fought out through documents to the extent they were in Europe.

There were several partial and occasional exceptions to this general observation. First, subject religious communities (*dhimmi*s) preserved two categories of documents over time. As *dhimmi*s had a defined legal status and a contractual relationship to the dominant community, some preserved documents that asserted specific exemptions or privileges. The Geniza records, which stored the written materials of the Jewish community of Cairo, are the other form of document collection preserved by a subject religious community.¹⁸ The Geniza's importance to the study of Mediterranean and Indian Ocean economic history is incomparable, and it has made the Jewish communities of Cairo and others with which they were in contact some of the best-studied communities in the medieval Mediterranean world. However, the Geniza was not an archive but a closed storehouse, and the papers that were preserved there were kept because of religious restrictions that forbade the destruction of written materials. It also is more valuable on the history of Jewish and merchant communities than on the dominant elite.¹⁹

A second exception is the trove of documents from the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem that Donald Little has studied with laudable tenacity, thoroughness, and precision. As valuable and rare as this find is, it appears to be composed for the most part of the records of a single *qādī* that survived by

¹⁸ See esp. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 4 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967–84).

¹⁹ For Mamlük-period documents attesting to *dhimmi* exemptions or privileges see A.S. Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai* (Baltimore, 1955); Atiya, “An Unpublished XIVth Century Fatwa on the Status of Foreigners in Mamluk Egypt and Syria,” in *Paul Kahle Festschrift, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Nahen und Fernen Ostens* (Leiden, 1953), 55–68; H. Ernst, *Die mamlukischen Sultansurkunden des Sinai-Klosters* (Wiesbaden, 1960); S.M. Stern, “Two Ayyubid Documents from Sinai,” in S.M. Stern ed., *Documents from Islamic Chanceries* (Oxford, 1965), 9–38, 207–16; N. Risciani, *Documenti e firmani* (Jerusalem, 1931). On one occasion part of the Jewish community of Damascus produced a document, supposedly drawn up by the Prophet, releasing them from paying the tax imposed on non-Muslims (*jizya*). The document was denounced as a forgery by Ibn Taymiyya and others: Ibn Kathir, 14/19.

lucky accident.²⁰ At the same time as these sources demonstrate the extent to which a single individual could make use of documents, their casual storage shows how their importance was relatively minor in the long-term control of power, property, or status. A third exception are documents such as the permission granted by one individual to another to represent a text or a body of knowledge (*ijāzās*) and certificates of pilgrimage or study that attested to the learning or piety of single individuals. These were in the normal course of events kept by their recipients, although in at least one case a book of transmitters of *hadīth* (accounts of the Prophet's words and deeds) was preserved in the mosque in the Ḥanbālī neighborhood of al-Ṣālihiyya on Mount Qāsyūn.²¹ Although these categories of documents provide useful information on a number of subjects, none is directly comparable in size or importance to the collections of original documents of the high or late medieval Latin West.

The fourth exception to this general observation is the *waqfiyya*, the foundation deed of the household charitable endowment (*waqf ahlī* or *waqf ahliyya*). The foundation of waqfs was one of the critical social and political practices of the period, as has been demonstrated most notably by one of the finest historians of medieval Cairo, Muhammad Muḥammad Amin, and put into application in a recent excellent study by Jonathan Berkey.²² As the waqf was perhaps the sole secure and readily available means of controlling property over time, waqfiyyas were without doubt a means by which the control of property was associated with documents.

Individual waqfiyyas were kept in various places. Although the registry of waqfs (*diwān al-awqāf*) may have kept some records of individual waqfs, one indication of the lack of faith individuals placed in document collections was the inscription of the stipulations of the waqf on the lintel or around the dome of the building the waqf supported. The beneficiaries of lesser waqfs often kept

²⁰ For the Ḥaram al-Sharif collection see L. Northrup and A.A. Abul-Hājj, "A Collection of Medieval Arabic Documents in the Islamic Museum at the Ḥaram al-Śarif," *Arabica* 25 (1978), 282–91; D. Little, *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram aṣ-Śarif in Jerusalem* (Beirut, 1984), 7–21, 59, 60. Little estimates that between one-half to two-thirds of the documents belonged one way or another to a single Shāfi'i qādī and administrator (nāzir) of endowments. Others are largely royal decrees, appointments to mansābs, estate inventories, and petitions (*qīṣa*), the latter two categories of documents drawn up in the course of a qādī's regular duties; also H. Luṭfi, *Al-Quds al-Mamlukiyya: a History of Mamluk Jerusalem based on the Ḥaram documents* (Berlin, 1985).

²¹ J. Sourdel-Thomine and D. Sourdel, "Nouveaux documents sur l'histoire religieuse et sociale de Damas au Moyen-Age," *REI* 32, no. 1 (1964), 1–25, for certificates of pilgrimage from the Saljūkīd and Ayyūbīd periods kept in the Umayyad Mosque. On the "booklet of auditors" (*kurrāṣa al-sāmī'un*), see chapter 4, note 209.

²² M.M. Amin, *al-Awqāf wa al-ḥayāt al-ijtimā'iyya fi misr* (Cairo, 1980); Amin, *Catalogue des documents d'archives du Caire, de 239/853 à 922/1516* (Cairo, 1981); J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton, 1992); for another fine study see U. Haarmann, "Mamluk Endowment Deeds as a Source for the History of Education in Late Medieval Egypt," *al-Abhāth* 28 (1980), 31–47. Waqfiyyas in Syria have not inspired a level of scholarship comparable to Cairo.

(or concealed) the original deed themselves. Moreover, waqfiyyas have to be used with care, as they refer to the intentions of the founder of a waqf. While these documents are without question informative on a variety of issues, we often do not have independent confirmation that the provisions of waqfiyyas were actually enacted. In fact, numerous reforms of waqfs and accusations of the “corruption” of waqfs and the usurpation of their income are fair though not conclusive indications that often they were not. In any case, waqfiyyas are most convincing as sources on the social uses of waqfs when their provisions are confirmed by other sources, rather than refuted as is often the case. The waqfiyyas that have survived also say more about a small section of the ruling (especially warrior) elite’s temporary control of property than they do about the *a'yān*. In Damascus, at least, a number of *a'yān* families controlled household waqfs over time, but most protected property with some difficulty and without the sanctification of possession through waqf.

With these occasional and partial exceptions the high medieval Middle East had few collections of original documents comparable to those preserved by the corporate bodies of the Latin West. As a general and necessarily loose principle, where in the high and late medieval Latin West collections of documents were on occasion lost by accident, in the Middle East it was by accident that they survived.

Moreover, in spite of the patrimonial practices of ruling groups in the Middle East, state archives and imperial literature would be of less use to urban social history, even had they survived, than such sources elsewhere. Scholars have turned up the occasional petition or handful of administrative documents, but in spite of the magisterial scholarship that these documents have inspired, they are valuable precisely because they are rare.²³ Even at the time, although registers and archives of various types existed, neither the bureaucracy nor recipients of these documents preserved them over long periods in major document collections comparable to those of the Latin West, the Ottoman empire, or Sung China. Nor was there any imperial literature in the medieval Middle East comparable to that of Sung China.²⁴

Documents were important to the functioning of the regime, especially in recording who (temporarily) controlled what (temporary) revenue source.

²³ S.M. Stern, “Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period,” *BSOAS* 27 (1964), 1–32; 29 (1966), 233–76. Major decrees in Syria have not survived except in inscriptions and as models for secretaries and clerks in administrative manuals: see G.L. Wiet, “Répertoire des décrets mamlouks de Syrie,” *Mélanges René Dussaud*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1939), 521–37.

²⁴ On the predominance of imperial historiography in the Sung period see H. Franke, “Some Aspects of Chinese Private Historiography in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” in W.G. Beasley and P.G. Pulleyblank eds., *Historians of China and Japan* (London, 1961), 115–34, esp. 118 for the possibility that the Sung forbade all private historical writing; D.C. Twitchett, “Chinese Biographical Writing,” in Beasley and Pulleyblank, *Historians*, 95–114, esp. 110–12 for how biographies, intriguingly similar in some respects to the biographical dictionaries of the Islamic world, were compiled by imperial officials to record the careers of officials, exemplify the values of the civil service, and validate the Confucian sensibility professed by officialdom.

Middle Eastern *diwāns* (registries) carried out cadastral surveys, kept detailed records of land and land grants, and were charged with the provision of money, grain, and goods to the ruler's household and his military formations. Rulers also wrote (with the aid of the chancellery) decrees for a variety of purposes. However, the document collections that existed appear not to have had the critical role in political or social competition characteristic of state, corporate, or household archives elsewhere. The chronicles rarely mention document collections in the context of social or political competition. This is not entirely due to neglect. Commercial contracts never extended to the political arena, and political relations were not generally understood as contractual. Nor did the decree produce elite status over generations, though there were a few exceptions. While petitions and their ensuing decrees were drawn up, these dealt with ephemeral problems. They rarely provided a basis for a notion of precedent, either in common law or in state practice, and there was little need to preserve them over long periods.²⁵ It is significant that in terms of decrees that produced temporary elite status we have models of decrees in manuals for secretaries rather than the decrees themselves. Otherwise state or administrative documents do not provide information on many of the crucial questions of urban political or social history to the extent they do elsewhere.

Here again the absence of surviving document collections is not entirely reducible to accidental loss, as scholars have often assumed.²⁶ A more satisfying explanation can be found in the nature of state power. If high medieval Middle Eastern rulers claimed a more undivided sovereignty than was the case with states in the Latin West, in common with other horse-warrior states of medieval Eurasia they had neither the knowledge nor the skills to administer the societies they dominated. Together with other such regimes they had a functional dependence on their subjects. Rulers in general did not penetrate the cities they dominated through intrusive state agencies, but by fitting themselves into existing social and cultural practices and turning them to political use. The formal state agencies of the high medieval Middle East were rudimentary compared to those of the Ottoman empire or Sung China, to take just two examples, and the agencies that existed preserved few documents (with the exception of land registries) over long periods. Even regions such as Egypt whose secretarial traditions stretched unbroken from Antiquity did not have a powerful or intrusive bureaucracy compared to states in other times and places. The Sung use of documents in the administration of the economy, in keeping detailed censuses, and in controlling subordinate elite institutions generally had few analogues in the medieval Middle East. In consequence, just as there were few large collections of original documents from notable and magnate households, cities, guilds, courts, or religious entities such as social

²⁵ For this observation see G. Leiser, review of S.M. Stern, *Coins in Documents from the Medieval Middle East*, in *JSS* 33 (1988), 144–5. ²⁶ Cf. Cahen, *Introduction*, 55–7.

historians of Europe have exploited, there were also few state archives (and little imperial literature) comparable to the Ottoman empire or Sung China.

The scarcity of original documents thus represents a fundamental difference in the social uses of writing from the other societies we have been considering. Groups in the high medieval Middle East did not incorporate, acquire formal autonomy or liberty, or reproduce themselves in time through documents in the manner of groups elsewhere. With the partial exception of the *waqfiyyas*, the few documents that have survived from the period convey less information about social relations than documents elsewhere. In most cases the possession over time of offices, status, property, and autonomy was neither claimed nor contested with reference to document collections. The antagonisms that Europeans fought out with decrees, titles, charters, patents, and deeds were contested in other domains.

There is no question that medieval Islamic historians should continue to search out documents and cherish those that they find. However, rather than privilege collections of original documents, we should return to a more fundamental question: how did the *a'yān* make use of their control over writing to advance their social and political strategies? If the *a'yān* of the high medieval Islamic Middle East did not generally preserve document collections as a means of transmitting status, did they make no social use of preserved written materials? One solution to this problem is to try to make better use of the evidence we do possess. If we stop asking what collections of original documents are available from this society or that, we can try to understand relationships among the storage of written materials, the contestation of the past, and the strategies of elites. This study suggests that it is the very “literary” information that has frustrated scholars in their search for more respectable sources that carries the most revealing information on relations between social strategies and cultural practices. Biographical literature in particular had many of the same uses in high medieval Damascus as collections of original documents had elsewhere and in other periods. The stereotypical material in these literary sources is not irrelevant to social history. On the contrary, it exists in such abundance because it had social uses that motivated our subjects to compose and preserve it.

The difficulty remains how to approach these problematic sources. Some were written later than the period they describe, all are filled with unverifiable anecdotes and shaped by literary conventions that are difficult to interpret. An obstacle that all social historians face is that our view of our subjects’ practices is inevitably obscured by our subjects’ own practices of representation. The sources from the high medieval Middle East include thousands of often idealized descriptions of individuals, accounts shaped by long-enduring literary conventions. When we read chronicles and biographical dictionaries we face the inevitable problem of distinguishing reliable accounts from literary commonplaces. While it is clear that dates, places, and names were generally correct, it is harder to demonstrate the accuracy of the anecdotes that were told

of individuals or the honorifics that were applied to them. This is why scholars have often hesitated to accept information on single individuals from these sources.

However, anecdotes such as those found in chronicles and biographical dictionaries also had social uses that can be interpreted. If we use these sources to understand the meanings and uses of the language in the biographies, we need not be hindered by the possibility that a specific anecdote or honorific may not have applied to a single individual. Whether these anecdotes were true or false is in some respects less important than that to those who told them and listened to them they made sense. It is their plausibility – how these memorialized accounts of individual lives fit into a social logic that our sources and their subjects shared – that we need to understand. To the extent that such language was formulaic it is something of an advantage, as through it we can glimpse at how our subjects imagined the social universe and plotted their movements within it. Rather than get bogged down determining the veracity of single anecdotes, historians should learn to listen to these stories, to understand how the *a'yān* made use of the past and contested it. For this purpose the biographical dictionaries and chronicles of Damascus have some positive advantages over the collections of original documents preserved by groups in some other contemporary societies. To the *a'yān* these accounts constituted the useful past, a past that was intended to secure their futures. As such these sources can be interpreted to understand how they perceived the social world and learned to survive in it.

Moreover, historiographical suspicion can be carried too far in the case of the high medieval period. This material poses fewer problems of interpretation than the biographical dictionaries of earlier periods of the Islamic Middle East, of Sung biographical literature, of saints' lives in Europe, or of late antique hagiography. Some of these biographies are quite lengthy, were written and read by their contemporaries, and included information that their subjects themselves provided.²⁷ We also have a number of accounts that scholars wrote about themselves, though to call this material autobiographical would be an overstatement. Because of the large amounts of material written by individuals about their contemporaries, associates, and intimates, we have in the case of high medieval Damascus a less obstructed view of our subjects than similar literature from other periods provides. So where we may never know whether particular people in fact had the "honor" or "piety" that a particular source attributed to them, these anecdotes are likely to have been "true" in the sense that these stories were believed by their contemporaries. To dismiss this information would be like claiming that the concept of "honor" is unimportant for the cultural history of medieval Europe because we know that

²⁷ For examples of shaykhs who wrote out their own biographies (*tarjama*) for other shaykhs see Subki, Staatsbibliothek MS, 36–8. Tāj al-Din Subki's biography of his father is 132 manuscript pages, and other exemplary shaykhs of the period benefited from similar lengthy attention.

some men called honorable were not, or might not have been, or that even if they were we can never be sure because honor was an expected *topos*. To ignore this information because it may be “untrue” is to ignore what are perhaps the most productive sources on some of the critical questions of the social and cultural history of the period.

There are other sources that can help us interpret some of the difficult material – especially the ubiquitous but unspecific words and phrases encountered at every turn – in the biographical dictionaries. *Fatwās* (legal opinions of individual jurists) and epistles (*rasā'i*) provide invaluable and relatively unproblematic supplements. *Waqfiyyas* and decrees are also useful, but must be used with care, since, as mentioned already, these documents mandated a result that often was not realized. Other sources such as the treatises written by jurists such as Ibn Jamā'a, al-Subkī, and Ibn al-Hājj pose more difficult problems of interpretation. These sources have been described as “pedagogical manuals,” or descriptions of the functioning of educational institutions, or angry denunciations of the corruptions of their times. In most cases the intent of these authors in writing remains either unclear or misunderstood by contemporary historians. Another problem is that some of these writers were from cities other than Damascus, though many passed through the city at one time or another. In all cases we have to read these sources critically, and we must be especially concerned to take into account the motives of their authors in writing them. But as these sources provide detailed descriptions of cultural practices that the biographers refer to obliquely if ubiquitously, they are invaluable as a supplement to the major sources of this study.

Less of a problem is the late date of some but by no means all of the chronicles and biographical dictionaries examined here. Ṣafadī, the author of the largest and most detailed biographical dictionaries of the period, died in 764/1363, and Nu‘aymī more than a century after that. However, even though the great *tabaqāt* or biographical dictionaries have survived better than smaller works, many other scholars wrote biographies of their contemporaries in their lifetimes, and all indications are that later scholars copied their predecessors’ work with care. Moreover, several sources “written” by later authors such as Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī or Nu‘aymī were in large part compilations of earlier texts. The selection and rearrangement of this material was common among these writers, and is an interesting topic in itself; but the vast amount of common material in earlier and later works confirms that later writers in most cases copied their predecessors as faithfully as they could. Moreover, we should ask whether accounts copied by later writers in their “own” works are any less reliable than the “original” sources copied by later (occasionally much later) copyists. As I shall show below, the search for “authorial intentionality” or “individuality” in the production and reproduction of these texts imposes modern expectations concerning how texts are composed and transmitted on a very different period. In any case, the large quantity of material written by high medieval Damascenes about themselves and their contemporaries is possibly unequalled in medieval Middle Eastern historiography.

The gap between the literary commonplace and the social reality need not be a barrier to historians. One suggestion of this study is that none of this “literary” material is meaningless or without social uses. That we possess these biographies and personal anecdotes at all is a tribute to the money, labor, and knowledge invested in composing and preserving them. If we square our strategies for exploiting historical sources with our subjects’ practices of representation and their uses of written material, these sources present some positive advantages over the collections of original documents preserved by some other contemporary Eurasian societies. If we learn to read these sources carefully, we can begin to understand the specific character of high medieval Middle Eastern social and cultural history with greater sensitivity and without an ever-implicit comparison to Europe.

Knowledge and social practice

When the methodologies of European social and institutional history are applied to the high medieval Middle East, and it emerges that formal groups and institutions in the Middle East had different forms and uses, we should pose the question: why has the study of formal institutions and group structures occupied such a central place in European social history? Perhaps the most important reason is that European practices of domination and social reproduction were expressed through differentiated institutions and well-defined social bodies, much more than was the case of the medieval Middle East. Comparisons of the formal institutions and groups of the Middle East and Europe have undoubtedly heuristic value. However, if historians are to avoid forever conjuring up an image of Europe in the world outside it, we should be alert less to structural differences than to differences in social practice.

A question social historians of the medieval Middle East should ask is what were the practices that produced and reproduced elite status, rather than whether its institutional and group structures were similar to those of the Latin West. Attention to social practice can help historians understand (and avoid) the imposition of concepts derived from European experience on societies outside Europe. Europeans have long imposed notions of legitimate order on their subjects through metaphors of functioning structures and bodies. Such notions of order have long shaped the “scientific” description of societies through metaphors taken from machines, buildings, cell structures, and texts.²⁸ One point of this study is to suggest that the social life of the medieval Islamic world (at the very least) cannot be diagrammed on a chart or a map, interpreted as a “text,” or represented through metaphors derived from functioning bodies. Nor can it be analyzed juridically as a system of rules. Rather, it is best approached by examining the practices by which groups oriented their actions to the future. It is in understanding such practices –

²⁸ Cf. M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology* (New York, 1982), xii.

rather than the structural forms that these practices took in Europe and a number of other societies – that social historians may find new approaches to old problems.

Interest in the practices by which households transmit their status has a long history in European social thought. Although attention to the uses of culture within the social strategies of groups goes back to Durkheim, Weber, and Fustel de Coulanges, among recent writers it is Elias and Bourdieu who have opened up new fields of reflection for historians.²⁹ Elias and Bourdieu studied practices of social reproduction out of a rejection both of the objectivist claims of mid-twentieth-century social science and the subjective or phenomenological hermeneutics proposed as alternatives to it. Bourdieu in particular has tried to understand how his subjects plot out their movements within the social world's possibilities and constraints. To Bourdieu, the critical practices of a society are to be found not in the "rules," but rather in the "practical sense" or "practical logic" by which people seek to understand the world and shape their futures in it.³⁰ Some of the most crucial of these practices are those by which lineages invest time, labor, and experience to acquire the symbolic and social "capital" that becomes expendable currency in the struggle for household survival.³¹ To Bourdieu, attention to the strategy rather than the rule is not a "replacement of structure by consciousness" as a subject of interpretation, but rather is a means of understanding how the structural and the individual interact.

This rethinking of the practices of sociological analysis has opened up new possibilities for social history. Examining practices of social reproduction enables us to establish interrelations between domains that historians have considered distinct. By examining household strategies, we can better consider relations among sex, property, the family, power, culture, and social

²⁹ P. Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris, 1979), trans. by R. Nice as *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA, 1984); Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique* (Paris, 1980), translated by R. Nice as *The Logic of Practice* (London and New York, 1990); Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique précédée de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Geneva, 1972), trans. by R. Nice as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977); Bourdieu, *Choses Dites* (Paris, 1987); Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Paris, 1984); Bourdieu with J.-C. Passeron, *Les Héritiers* (Paris, 1964), trans. by R. Nice as *The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture* (Chicago, 1979); N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, 2 vols. (Basel, 1939; Suhrkamp, 1976), translated by E. Jephcott as *The Civilizing Process* in 3 vols.: *The History of Manners* (New York, 1978), *Power and Civility* (New York, 1982), *The Court Society* (New York, 1983).

³⁰ See P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflective Sociology*, M. Adamson trans. (Stanford, 1990), 59–75; Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*; Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 52–65. See especially his comparison of the "rules of marriage" and the "elementary structures of kinship" with matrimonial strategies within practices of social reproduction in *ibid.*, 187–99. Bourdieu reprises these themes in a critique of "juridisme" in *Choses Dites*, 94–105.

³¹ On symbolic capital see Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 178–9, and Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 108–12, on how symbolic capital is used to transmute the private "egoistic" interests of its possessors into "'disinterested' collective, publicly avowable, legitimate interests."

relations simultaneously. We also widen the phenomena that social historians study to include manners, deportment, conduct, ritual, the presentation of the body, and the imitation of the old by the young.³² We can also use evidence that social and cultural historians have seen as anomalous or elusive. Accounts of dreams, gestes, gestures, and *bons mots*, the tall tales, cover stories, and hagiographic commonplaces of biographical anecdotes all provide useful information on relations between cultural practices and social strategies. Such an approach will help us understand better where the modern conceptual unities of politics, culture, economy, and society merged in Damascus and in other areas of the high medieval Middle East – in the household.

This study seeks to interpret practices that social historians of the high medieval Middle East have largely ignored in their search for the “deeper structures” of social life, and that cultural historians have seen as universally Islamic, largely without particular social meanings and uses. In particular, this study shows how the *a‘yān* acquired and used the rare symbolic capital by which they claimed power, resources, and social honor and passed them on within lineages. The *a‘yān* of Damascus advanced their strategies of social survival through cultural practices associated with knowledge. Scholars have studied these practices as aspects of higher education. However, the analysis of what follows is not a contribution to the study of education. Its aim is quite different. Lecturing, reading, writing, friendship among scholars, and the imitation of cultural exemplars can address some larger and long-unsettled questions, not just to approach institutional history or the history of education. By studying such practices we can begin to understand how elite households constructed their fundamental social bonds, competed among themselves and with others, and passed on their status in time.

In order to compare the social history of the high medieval Middle East to that of other medieval societies, we should examine these practices, rather than the structures and institutions that in Europe were one way such practices were articulated. Although this is not a comparative study in the sense that it compares two societies systematically on any given problem, and still less contributes to a universal model, it nonetheless makes comparisons throughout. The reason for this is three-fold. First, from the earliest European descriptions of Islamic societies, disentangling European projections from Middle Eastern realities has been difficult at best. Since the medieval period, most European descriptions of the Middle East have been at least implicitly comparative, and contemporary historians can only benefit by trying to make these comparisons explicit. Second, when studying practices as elusive and universal as those related to the production of knowledge, situating them against similar practices elsewhere can elicit some of their particular meanings and uses. Finally, by putting the place and period in the widest possible

³² See the introduction to the 1968 edition of Elias, *The History of Manners*, 221–63.

historical context, we can alert ourselves to the contingent nature of our own practices of analysis and description. Perhaps only by the systematic suspicion that attention to wider contexts induces can we try to avoid inscribing an image of ourselves in the past.

The two areas most often brought into comparison are the Latin West, especially high medieval France, and Southern Sung China (1127–1279). These of course are large and varied regions, and can be used for comparative purposes only in broad strokes and with numerous reservations. But there are defensible reasons for bringing them into a study of the high medieval Middle East. One is that both regions experienced larger developments in Eurasian history that also affected the high medieval Middle East, and can be studied to understand the peculiarities of the Middle Eastern experience. A second reason is that in several of the crucial questions of the study – the nature of medieval sources, the problematic issue of state power, the study of medieval education, among others – the Latin West and Sung China provide well-studied and familiar points of comparison. But the most important reason for bringing in these two regions is that it enables us to criticize the mistaken imposition of European notions of order on the high medieval Middle East. The Latin West and Sung China have been seen as societies that correspond reasonably well to European notions of legitimate order. One of the principal arguments of this book is that scholars have long imposed preconceived ideals of order on the medieval Middle East, and have seen departures from these ideals in the Middle East as “corruption,” “despotism,” or “disorder.” By studying societies that fit (however problematically) modern European notions of legitimate order we come to understand the different character of social life in the high medieval Middle East generally, and more specifically in the case examined here, Damascus.

Each of the chapters that follow will try to understand how the *a‘yān* households of Damascus made use of knowledge in their strategies of social survival. Chapter 1 examines how changing forms of domination in seventh/twelfth- and eighth/thirteenth-century Damascus transformed the recruitment, relations to power, and conditions of social reproduction of the civilian elite. It places these developments in the wider context of Eurasian history in the period to bring out the peculiarities of the high medieval Middle East, and to introduce the concepts of maladroit patrimonialism and *fitna* as they shaped the social history of Damascus. Chapter 2 looks at madrasas and *dār al-ḥadīth*s to understand how the household charitable foundation (*waqf ahli*) and the transmission of knowledge intersected in the social life of the city. This chapter addresses previous scholarship more than the others, both to show how the problem has been misconstrued and to set up the arguments in the following chapters.

The central argument of the book begins with chapter 3. This chapter argues that the proliferation of household charitable institutions transformed the arena of elite social life by establishing a large number of stipendiary posts

called *mansabs*, not by providing the a‘yān with a new and specialized form of “higher education.” The chapter shows that *mansabs* became objects of social struggle among the a‘yān in the same manner as *iqtā‘s* (temporary land grants) became prizes of competition among amīrs. The chapter argues that in both cases it is only by studying competitive practices of fitna that can we understand the distinctive character of politics and social life in the city. Chapter 4 examines how the a‘yān gained their cultural distinction, advanced their social strategies by it, and passed it on within their households. Its purpose is to examine the ritual, mimetic, and performative practices that underlay what in the modern world (and in much scholarship about the medieval Islamic world) are conceived of as separate cultural and social domains. By looking at how both warrior and a‘yān households made use of these practices, this chapter also proposes to demonstrate that they cannot be trimmed down to fit a discussion of “higher education,” as they have usually been conceived. Chapter 5 examines how the a‘yān made use of their control over the production of knowledge in their larger social strategies. In this chapter I hope to show that the domains of “law,” “education,” and the “suppression of heresy,” were conceived as arenas of fitna in which social prizes were contested by similar practices and represented in nearly identical language. The chapter argues that just as civilians and warriors maneuvered in a similar environment, the arena of fitna, their practices within it further blur the distinction between the “political” domain of warriors and the “social” domain of civilians.

Geographical limitations, chronology, transliteration, and citations

Specific geographical and chronological designations remain unresolved problems in the history of the medieval Islamic world. The term “Middle East” is of course anachronistic, but it is useful to the extent that it defines one region of the larger Islamic world that has posed similar conceptual and historiographical problems. In this book the term refers to those areas that were subjected directly or indirectly to Saljūk forms of political power, legitimization, and social control, especially Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, al-‘Irāq, and Iran. These regions were so distinctive that this study does not presume to pronounce on all of them, but rather to address students of the period, who face similar problems in each of them. Chronology poses a similar difficulty. For the purposes of this work the somewhat artificial notion of a “high medieval” period resolves a number of problems. The high medieval period in Syria and Egypt begins with the arrival of the “military patronage” Saljūk-successor states of the Nūrids and Ayyūbids in the mid-twelfth century. Forms and practices of political power, patterns of military recruitment, the support and way of life of urban elites, and relations between cities and villages all changed in this period throughout Syria and Egypt. The period is one in which Syria and Egypt maintained a strong and fairly stable position within

Mediterranean and Indian Ocean patterns of trade, and in which Syria and Egypt experienced the arrival of large numbers of outsiders such as Franks, Kurds, Turks, and Mongols. The terminus is more difficult to define, but the Black Death of 748/1347–749/1348–9 was, if not the end of the period, the beginning of the end. The epidemic not only had a devastating effect on the region demographically, with the economic, social, and political consequences that followed, but also transformed the Mediterranean economy. In any case, a transitional period between the Black Death and Tamerlane's invasion of Syria in 803/1400 inaugurated the marked changes that gave the late medieval period its distinctive characteristics.

Transliteration: I have followed a modified *International Journal of Middle East Studies* format, with several differences. Titles and proper nouns are spelled as they are in data bases and research resources, i.e. without assimilation of the definite article or elision of the hamza al-waṣl. In the transliteration of texts, nouns are largely unwoweled except when necessary to avoid solecisms such as the placement of three consonants in a row, to convey the correct reading, or in the case of poetry, where I have given a transliteration of sound rather than script in order to permit easier verification of my readings. Well-known persons and places are referred to by their standard English name, when there is no possibility of confusion: Saladin for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ayyūbī, Mecca for al-Makka, but al-‘Irāq rather than Iraq to call attention to differences between medieval and modern usage. The term Syria refers to the region bounded by the Tarsus to the north and al-‘Arīsh to the south.

Citations: in citing Arabic sources I have followed the practice of Arab historians of separating the volume from the page number with a slash. For example, Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 22/101 refers to volume 22, page 101. In citing Arabic manuscripts I have generally followed the pagination of the texts as written in by later scholars or librarians, with *a* referring to the left page and *b* to the right, when appropriate, that is to say when it is impossible to verify foliation or when the letters are written in the text. In manuscripts with multiple pagination, I have cited the number on the page that seems to fit the dominant scheme, even though in one or two cases the dominant scheme shifts in mid-text. Until these manuscripts are reliably edited and published there will always be room for confusion and debate, and I hope that others who have used these texts will bear with me if our citations do not agree exactly. Citations of unpaginated chronicles are by the year.

CHAPTER 1

The a‘yān of Damascus, 590/1193–750/1350

In the high medieval period, Damascus was larger and richer than most other cities in the Middle East, and its inhabitants exploited a variety of sources of wealth. Outside the walls, and watered by the Barada river, was the agricultural plain of the Ghūṭa, which produced cash crops for landlords.¹ Damascus was one of the wealthiest trading cities of the region, and straddled trade routes connecting the Mediterranean, Central Asia, Arabia, and the Indian Ocean. The city was also a political and administrative center, and at times an imperial capital. It attracted clerks and secretaries, poets, holy men, scholars, and soldiers from many parts of the Islamic world. It was a shrine center itself and benefited from the traffic in pilgrims to other holy places such as the Ḥijāz and Jerusalem. Yet, while Damascus supported landowners, merchants, holy men, bureaucrats, soldiers, and scholars, one of the striking continuities of the high medieval period is that elites of such varied types transmitted their status over generations by their control over property only with difficulty. Although it is clear that some households controlled property better than others, secure control of property over time never provided the *stabilitas loci* that it did in Europe.

There were several reasons for the disjunction between the long-term control of property and the power and status of a‘yān households. First, Islamic inheritance law, to the extent that it determined practice, obstructed the transmission of property intact through descent groups.² Gifts *inter vivos*, benefices, and charitable foundations provided only partial expedients by which individuals could limit the large number of their heirs. A second related reason was the structure of authority within families. Senior male members of extended families, and not single lines of descent within them, tended to hold power and control property. Although cooperation among descent groups

¹ On the Ghūṭa and the agricultural wealth of the city see N. Elisséeff, “Dimashk,” *EI* (2), 278; Elisséeff, “Ghūṭa,” *EI* (2); Ibn Shākir (al-Kutubī), *‘Uyān al-tawārikh*, Nabila ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Dāwūd and Fayṣal al-Sāmir eds. (Baghdad, 1984), 21/299; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 222; R.S. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus* (Albany, 1977), 12–13.

² J. Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford, 1964), 169–74; N. J. Coulson, *Succession in the Muslim Family* (Cambridge, 1971).

provided a partial corrective to this, property generally tended to be parceled out over time rather than preserved intact under the control of a single line of descent. A third reason was the absence of intermediate social structures such as formal estates or corporate bodies between ruling groups and the general population.³ A'yān households could not reliably turn corporate social practices or entities to their benefit.

While we have no reliable statistics on elite control over property in the period, what most confirms the precariousness of property is the high level of predation on civilians by ruling warriors and outside conquerors. As the sources make clear again and again, warriors mulcted wealthy city people frequently, and often confiscated large sums of cash from them, even if they sometimes left cash-producing properties in the control of individuals. Although individuals often had the political connections and social capital to control property in their lifetimes, few large fortunes survived their deaths for long. While historians often refer to the civilian elites of high medieval Muslim cities as “urban notables,” the a'yān of Damascus do not fit well Weber's definition of urban notables as a group that controls property with confidence, values a leisurely lifestyle, and participates by birthright in politics.⁴

To understand how changing forms of domination transformed the social universe of the city's a'yān and conditioned their social strategies within it, it will be useful first to examine some of the wider changes that Damascenes found themselves living through. Damascus during this period was subjected to a number of political forms and practices that became widespread throughout medieval Eurasia. To see more clearly the distinctiveness of the social and cultural history of Damascus, and of the Middle East more broadly, we turn first to a consideration of the wider medieval Eurasian context.

The unity of the medieval Eurasian world

The Middle East in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries shared a number of characteristics with other Eurasian agrarian societies of the period. Historians have long stressed the integrity and uniqueness of Islamic civilization as a historical unity. However, in spite of the features that mark off the Islamic world – its characteristic forms of trade, religion, high culture, and political and social organization – the region resembled in some important respects other areas of contemporary Eurasia.

The reason for these similarities was the medieval integration of the Eurasian continent, a phenomenon that long preceded European expansion within it. A series of interrelated developments – growing trade networks,

³ See especially Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 185–91.

⁴ M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, G. Roth and C. Wittich eds. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978), 950; for an illuminating discussion of the “notable” in the Weberian sense see P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, B. Pearce trans. (London, 1990), 42–54.

large-scale movements of currency and technology, the diffusion of similar forms of state power, religion, and ideology, pressures from steppe and desert peoples, and exposure to common disease pathogens – exposed many areas of the continent to similar influences.

Possibly the most crucial reason for the increasing integration of the continent was the diffusion of new military technologies.⁵ Beginning in Late Antiquity, new weapons and equipment, including horse and camel saddles, the stirrup, and horse-warrior equipment and hand-weapons, upset the balance of foot-soldiers and horsemen characteristic of antiquity. Horse-warriors throughout the continent broke up older forms of empire and established new forms of political organization. Even Vikings and Arabs, arriving in agrarian regions on ships or camels, adopted the horse and techniques of horse warfare in order to conquer rather than raid.⁶ By around 1100 (and in many places much earlier), from Japan to the Atlantic, most regions capable of supporting horses also supported a socially and politically dominant horse-riding elite.

The major exception – though a partial and temporary one – was China in the Southern Sung period. What accounted for the Southern Sung's relative immunity to the horse-warrior revolution occurring elsewhere was its salutary combination of terrain unsuited to horses, the world's first permanently stationed navy, excellent fortifications, gunpowder weapons, and cast-iron technology that allowed for the mass production of effective weapons and equipment, especially crossbows.⁷ Even so the Southern Sung put an expensive and bureaucratically organized effort into acquiring its own horses, and guarded one of its frontiers by giving a hereditary group of horse-warriors its independence and autonomy.⁸ Each of these factors contributed to its temporary immunity to developments occurring elsewhere.

With the partial exception of China, there were two major consequences of the dominance of horse-warriors in agrarian Eurasia. One was to narrow the

⁵ W. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago, 1982), 15–23, for a suggestive synthesis of scholarship on the role of the horse in Eurasian history. Lynn White Jr. has done more than any other scholar to study the diffusion of military technology throughout the continent: L. White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford, 1962); White, "The Crusades and the Technological Thrust of the West," in V.J. Parry and M. E. Yapp eds., *War, Technology, and Society in the Middle East* (London, 1975), 97–112; see also J. Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe, 730–1200* (Ithaca, 1971), 9–10; P. Contamine, *La Guerre au moyen âge* (Paris, 1980), trans. by M. Jones as *War in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1984), 28, 58, 67.

⁶ See D.R. Hill, "The Role of the Camel and the Horse in the Early Arab Conquests," in Parry and Yapp, *War, Technology and Society*, 32–43; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 28ff.

⁷ See P.J. Smith, *Taxing Heaven's Storehouse: Horses, Bureaucrats, and the Destruction of the Sichuan Tea Industry, 1074–1224* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 14; H. Franke, "Siege and Defense of Towns in Medieval China," in F. Kierman and J.K. Fairbank eds., *Chinese Ways of Warfare* (Cambridge, MA, 1974); Lo Jung-Pang, "The Emergence of China as a Sea Power during the Late Sung and Early Yuan Periods," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 14 (1955), 489–503; Lo Jung-Pang, "Maritime Commerce and its Relationship to the Song Navy," *JESHO* 12 (1969), 57–107; McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power*, 32–9.

⁸ Smith, *Taxing Heaven's Storehouse*, 248–306.

range of political economies throughout the continent. Many regions now supported expensive horse-riding warriors, their weapons and equipment, and their animals from agriculture, plunder, and trade revenues. As these regions were now subjected to similar imperatives and constraints, they came to resemble one another in some crucial respects, even when they had no direct contact among themselves.

Another consequence was the fragmentation of political power throughout the agrarian regions of the continent. From the perspective of rulers of centralized states, small groups of horsemen were difficult either to dominate directly or to defeat on the battlefield. In many regions of agrarian Eurasia, horse-warriors either controlled power and resources or disputed them with the ruling groups of central states. When horse-warriors tried to monopolize the agricultural surplus and military power, ruling establishments found it difficult to subject them to their control. Even where rulers claimed sovereignty over large areas, and had supporters to advance their claims, they allowed warrior elites a fair degree of privilege and autonomy, and political power if not sovereignty itself tended to be parcelized. The memory of universal empire survived in Japan, the Middle East, and the Latin West, and in each of these places horse-warriors derived their legitimacy in part from a surviving symbol of a one-time imperial unity. Emperors, caliphs, or popes all filled sacral roles that rulers could not. But centralized administration and imperial ideology were incipient if not incidental characteristics of central states. Where rulers had some control over horse-warriors, they most often ruled by playing off the dynamic tension of rival interests. Though they may have tried, rulers could rarely command their military support through an impersonal hierarchical leadership, or overawe them with an imperial ideology. Instead, power was often diffused among groups that were rarely leveled beneath an effective apparatus of government.⁹

How power, sovereignty, and resources were parceled out among rulers and horse-warriors differed from region to region. Although some scholars have portrayed the Latin West as paradigmatic of “feudal” medieval societies, compared to the Middle East its politics were exceptionally fragmented.¹⁰

⁹ For Europe there is a large literature on these topics. See especially O. Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs im Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1965) for an account of how practices of the “feud,” and not the structures of the “state,” were at the basis of the social and political orders of medieval Austria. Brunner’s account should be of interest to medieval Islamic historians, as it is an important and controversial critique of nineteenth-century liberal historiography’s emphasis of law and the distinction between the public and private spheres as the foundation of legitimate social order. For India see J.C. Heesterman, *India and the Inner Conflict of Tradition* (Chicago, 1988), 16ff. for an acute and wide-ranging discussion of medieval politics that addresses issues of interest to medieval Islamic historians.

¹⁰ On medieval relations among control of land, sovereignty, and military power see Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 238–49; J.S. Critchley, *Feudalism* (London, 1978); P. Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies* (Oxford, 1989), 147–75; N. Elias, *Power and Civility*, 3–201; M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. I (Cambridge, 1986); P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1980); Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft*; P. Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, 2nd edn.

Rulers in both the high medieval Latin West and the Middle East balanced land-holding horse-warrior lineages with manpower recruited with cash and dependent on rulers. But the relative proportions of these two groups in terms of power and control over revenue were reversed. In the Latin West *stipendiarii, mercenarii milites, ministeriales*, and others attached to rulers and paid in cash did not hold the preponderance of social or political power.¹¹ Well into the late fourteenth century they were overshadowed by a feudal hereditary aristocracy.¹² In the Middle East military lineages existed, but they were few in number.¹³ Decisive military power and the social status that went with it were held by warriors in urban garrisons replenished frequently by fresh troops recruited with cash, not by a territorially dispersed aristocracy.

Even though relationships among land, sovereignty, and military power in the two civilizations were similar, there were clear differences as well. In the Latin West – rivaled (but not equaled) only by Japan in this respect – aristocrats had formal autonomies, derived sovereignties, seigniorial jurisdiction, and effective control over land.¹⁴ The power and autonomy of the aristocracy derived from an earlier period, when rulers had few resources other than land and booty to reward their military supporters, but in the high medieval period rulers rarely tried to abolish the formal rights of the nobility. On the contrary, the control of the feudal aristocracy over land and hereditary status solidified in the period.¹⁵

Where by the thirteenth century some kings in the Latin West began to benefit from techniques of centralized administration, a cult of royalty, garrisons of royal troops, the resources of cities, and monetized economies, these rulers still had fewer political resources than ruling groups in the Middle East. Relative to Middle Eastern rulers they generally had fewer resources in precious metals. Moreover, even when some rulers had more money than their rivals, they had fewer sources of recruitment of unattached manpower. The

(New York, 1976); M. Bloch, *Feudal Society*, L. Manyon trans. (London, 1961); F.L. Ganshof, *Feudalism* (New York, 1951); E.A.R. Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and the Historians of Medieval Europe," *American Historical Review* 79 (1974), 1063–88; R. Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: the Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (London, 1986).

¹¹ See especially Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 65–99. Also for an interesting account of a European situation that appeared much like a Middle Eastern one, see Frederick II's garrisoned company of mounted "Saracen" archers in Apulia in P. Pieri, "I Saraceni di Lucera nella storia militare medievale," *Archivio Storico Pugliese* 6 (1953), 94–101.

¹² Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 99.

¹³ For one example see the Banū Hījī, a military lineage at least three generations in length; see Jazārī, *Ḩawādīth al-zamān*, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds arabes MS 6739, 236. For a short episode of hereditary control over property in Baybar's reign see Irwin, *The Middle East*, 50; Irwin, "Iqṭā' and the End of the Crusader States," in P. M. Holt ed., *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977), 62–77.

¹⁴ On similarities between European and Japanese relations among land, sovereignty, local administration, and politics, see Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, esp. 12–13.

¹⁵ For one view of how centralizing royal power in France was counterbalanced by the aristocracy's continuing claims to autonomy in thirteenth-century France, see M. Bourin-Derrau, *Temps d'équilibres temps de ruptures. XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1990), 199–204, 256–9.

Latin West had no internal barbarians, and even if there were barbarian peoples on its frontiers, rulers seldom if ever recruited them.¹⁶ Rulers in the Latin West also had, in general, fewer and smaller cities than the ruling groups of some regions in the Middle East.

In part because the political resources of kings in the Latin West were relatively meager (though undoubtedly increasing) a feudal aristocracy continued to appropriate a large share of surplus production and usually resided on the land, over whose inhabitants they retained jurisdiction. Europeans have often regarded in retrospect this parcelization of sovereignty as a “consensual” political system, the absence of which elsewhere is taken as symptomatic of a “failure” to develop a hereditary aristocracy, one with formal “rights.” Viewing the Latin West from a wider Eurasian perspective, a high medieval observer might have been troubled by just the opposite: the Latin West appears to have “failed” to forestall the appearance of a territorial aristocracy and the spatial parcelization of sovereignty.

One consequence of the relative isolation of the Latin West and Japan was that more than in several other agrarian areas of Eurasia, hereditary aristocracies held local leadership and controlled local revenues. While feudal aristocrats cooperated on the basis of common interests and values with royal or imperial authorities, they were jealous of their prerogatives. Kings and emperors, with some exceptions, accommodated themselves to a fractious and independent military elite, one conscious of its “rights.” The power of monarchies and their agents grew throughout the period. The heavily armored knight was first joined and then supplanted by massed infantry and archers; the local nobility found its jurisdictional authority circumscribed. But the business of the aristocracy continued to be war; and their way of life rural. It was only beginning around 1500 in Europe and 1600 in Japan that monarchies had the money, administrative agencies, and gunpowder weapons to undercut decisively the derived sovereignties and seigniorial authority of feudal aristocrats.

By contrast, in several other areas of agrarian Eurasia, ruling groups throughout the medieval period had greater resources in cash, goods, and unattached manpower. Ruling groups of agrarian states on the periphery of Central and Inner Asia gained revenues from a variety of sources, including trade, tribute, plunder, and agriculture. With these revenues, rulers recruited and supported barbarian manpower to a greater extent than rulers in the medieval Latin West. Agrarian empires on the frontier arc of Central and Inner Asia enticed troops from among pastoral and mountain peoples into their service. Some also purchased slaves as imperial guards, or, as happened

¹⁶ See P. Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies*, 150ff. for the relative absence in Europe of internal or external barbarians as sources of military recruitment. Italian cities, for long an exception, did rely for their defense on mercenaries and the use of more sophisticated weaponry (especially crossbows and pikes) and fortifications; but this was to defend small cities rather than to dominate large areas.

in the Middle East, as whole commands.¹⁷ The formal autonomies, derived sovereignties, and “rights” to property of the Latin West were rare or non-existent in other areas of the continent.

Another critical difference between the Latin West and Japan on the one hand and the Middle East (together with a number of other areas of Eurasia) on the other was that in the Latin West and Japan pastoralists were rarely if ever integrated into state apparatuses. Elsewhere pastoralists were often a critical source of military manpower. To the regular misery of Sung generals, and the approval of Mamlūk writers, pastoralists were hardier on campaign than peasants or city people, and were often good horsemen and archers, skills best learned in childhood.¹⁸ Moreover, in agrarian regions pastoralists were usually outsiders, and where they had no local ties they could be played as trumps in local political conflicts. Recruitment of pastoralists widened the gap between warriors and the city people among whom they lived. The warrior elite of many agrarian societies across Eurasia was separated by language, culture, and way of life from the agriculturists and city people they ruled.

Another difference was that in the Middle East the political power of the ruling elite was exercised from cities. When rulers recruited manpower with cash and settled decisive elements of it in urban garrisons, they blocked horse-warriors from controlling the surplus and leadership in rural areas. Urban settlement also gave ruling groups the administrative and ideological services of literate city people. Scribes recorded revenue sources and oversaw the income and expenditures of ruling households, necessary services to outside conquerors. Rulers also made use of scholars to translate tribal conquest into legitimate rule in the eyes of their subjects. Moreover, scholars provided rulers with truths which could be directed against their own kin, boon-companions, and tribal supporters. The ideological services of scholars elevated the authority of rulers over warriors and insulated ruling houses from their kin and tribal supporters. Rulers found these ideas especially useful in countering pastoral ideas of clan solidarity and sovereignty, as well as the egalitarianism of the war band.¹⁹ By associating themselves with scholars, priests, and religious leaders, rulers made claims to power unthinkable in pastoral or war-band society.

All of these resources – cash revenues, recruitment of unattached military manpower, cities, and the services of urban elites – counterbalanced the tendency of horse-warriors to autonomy. When Middle Eastern rulers had the

¹⁷ This was a long-term development. In the 'Abbāsid period, the caliphate reduced its dependence on its own soldiers by recruiting outsiders until it had entire regiments composed of slaves: D. Ayalon, “The Muslim City and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and the Arts*, 2, no. 14 (1967), 313; Ayalon, “The Euro-Asiatic Steppe – a Major Reservoir of Power for the Islamic World,” *Proceedings of the 25th Congress of Orientalists* (Moscow, 1960); P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: the Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge, 1980), 74–80. ¹⁸ Ayalon, “Mamlūk,” 314.

¹⁹ On Central Asian concepts of clan sovereignty see Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 67–9, 84, 240.

cash to recruit military manpower, garrisons in which to concentrate warriors, and cities that provided the services of literate civilians, they prevented warrior lineages from taking direct control of land. This was also largely true of a number of other states on the frontier arc of Central and Inner Asia. It was peripheral areas of Eurasia, such as the Latin West and later Japan, that were exceptions to this more general pattern. Only in such places were the political resources of ruling groups in money and unattached manpower so weak that warriors were able to settle on the land, exploit it directly, and claim shared sovereignties and seigniorial jurisdiction.

To gain an idea of the continental extent of these practices, we may consider the common features of several contemporary empires on the rim of Central and Inner Asia, though others might be brought into the discussion as well. The “Islamic” empires of the Ghaznavids (999–1140) and Saljuks (1038–1194), and the “Sinicized” empires of the Jürchen Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) and Khitan Liao empire (907–1125) might seem at first glance to have little in common. However, in spite of evident differences among these empires, their similarities are striking enough to suggest a convergence of political constraints and possibilities around the frontier arc of Central and Inner Asia.

These four empires were ruled by horse-riding warriors of recent pastoral or semi-pastoral origin, though how Central and Inner Asian peoples came to control agrarian populations differed in each case.²⁰ These states all adjoined and often usurped territories of agrarian empires, and gained cash revenues (directly or indirectly) from trade. They also used revenues from trade, plunder, and tribute as political and military assets, in particular to procure sophisticated military technology and equipment and to support military manpower.²¹ The political problematic of these states in ruling agrarian areas and controlling their own followers was similar in some general respects.

²⁰ On the Ghaznavids and Saljuks see below, note 23. On the similar characteristics and problematics of the “Sinicized kingdoms” see T. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier. Nomadic Empires and China* (Oxford, 1989), 164–84; H. Franke, “Jurchen Customary Law and Chinese Law of the Chin Dynasty,” in D. Eikemeir and H. Franke eds., *State and Law in East Asia* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 215–33; Franke, “The Forest Peoples of Manchuria: Kitans and Jurchens,” in D. Sinor ed., *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge, 1990), 400–23, esp. 408–10, 421–2; J. Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge, 1982), 186–94, 350–9; R. Grousset, *L'Empire des steppes* (Paris, 1939), 180–222; Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China: Discussions under the Jurchen-Chin Dynasty (1125–1234)* (Seattle and London, 1984), 20, 51–72, 75–81; 117–23; O. Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Boston, 1962), 128, 513–51; W. Rodzinski, *A History of China*, vol. I (Oxford, 1979), 145–52, 163–4; J.J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (New York, 1971), 17–23; Jing-shen Tao, *The Jürchen in Twelfth Century China: A Study of Sinicization* (Seattle, 1976); Jing-shen Tao, “Liao,” art. *Encyclopedia of Asian History*, A.T. Embree ed. (New York and London, 1988), 424–6; K. Wittfogel and Feng, Chia-Sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907–1125)* (Philadelphia, 1949); R. von Glan, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes. Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 173.

²¹ See Fu Lo-Huan, “Natpat and Ordo. A Study of the Way of Life and Military Organization of the Khitan Emperors and their People,” Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 1950) for how the least “sinicized” of these empires in fact made substantial use of Chinese administrative techniques, ideas, and personnel. The Khitans largely lived outside China, and this fact and the

Although the troops of these empires were for the most part of tribal origin, the rulers of these states abolished or modified the tribal ties of their most crucial military formations, organized them in disciplined formations, and often stationed elements of their armies in fortified cities. In cities they also found efficient producers of weapons and equipment and in some cases experts in siege warfare.

Another common characteristic of these regimes was that they made use of literate city-dwellers for religious, ideological, and administrative services. Scholars and bureaucrats advanced the sustaining pretenses of these regimes' dominance to the world at large and helped them to exploit the resources of cities and villages. Mandarins, priests, or 'ulamā', scholars often modified or rationalized the law codes, religious beliefs and practices, and ideas of sovereignty of pastoral conquerors. Scholars have usually studied pastoralist rule over agrarian areas by investigating the "Islamicization," or "Sinicization" of these empires; but a more important question, and a less idealist one, is to ask how rulers made selective use of pastoral manpower and agrarian resources for specific ends.

The fusion of nomad manpower, cash revenues, and imperial forms of political organization and ideology made these states powerful incubators of empires. They took military, political, ideological, and administrative practices from empires that preceded or bordered them; and their patterns of relations among pastoralist warriors and agrarian peoples became models for the empires that succeeded them. The Liao empire formulated several of the political practices the Mongols carried with them later and elsewhere.²² In the case of South-West Asia, patterns of relations among ruling houses, barbarian manpower, and urban elites first worked out by the Ghaznavids and adopted by the Saljuks radiated throughout the Islamic world, including Iran, al-`Irāq, Syria, Anatolia, al-Jibāl, and al-Hind, and in time their successors applied them throughout Egypt and North Africa as well.²³

absence of the adoption of Chinese manners by the emperor led Fu to describe the empire as consisting of "two states." This seems to confuse the cultural problem of acculturation with the political problem of empire-building, one that in spite of some obvious differences seems similar to the Saljuq case. The Khitan emperor, through the system of the "dual administrations," exploited his Chinese domains and controlled his own supporters by making use of Chinese offices and administrators: 73–5, 78, and esp. 79; for the modification of tribal ties by the emperor see 99, 102, and esp. 111. Also, Fu's assertion that the Khitan emperor retained a pastoral mode of life is supported by evidence that seems to demonstrate that the emperor maintained something like a peripatetic imperial hunt, a very different thing, and one that again resembles, though in an exaggerated form, the Middle Eastern case.

²² See esp. P.B. Buell, "Sino-Khitan Administration in Mongol Bukhara," *Journal of Asian History* 13 (1979), 121–47, esp. 137 ff.

²³ On the Ghaznavids see C.E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran* (Edinburgh, 1963); R.N. Frye ed., *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. IV: *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs* (Cambridge, 1975); on the Saljuks see J.A. Boyle ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. V: *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods* (Cambridge, 1968); C. Cahen, "The Turkish Invasion: the Selchukids," in K. Setton gen. ed., *A History of the Crusades*, 2nd edn. (Madison, 1969). On the dissemination of these practices in al-Hind, see C.E. Bosworth, *The Later Ghaznavids. Splendour and Decay: the Dynasty in Afghanistan and Northern India, 1040–1186* (Edinburgh, 1977); A. Wink, *Al-Hind: the Making of the Indo-Islamic World* vol. I (Leiden, 1990), 21–3, 62, 127, 166.

The Saljūks especially combined Central Asian manpower and imperial ideology and organization more successfully than their rivals. Because they straddled both lucrative trade routes (although the exact amount of money they gained from trade is unknown) and the border between pastoral areas of Central Asia and agrarian areas of South-West Asia, Saljūk rulers had several advantages over their competitors. They had more nomad manpower than states in the center of the Islamic world. They also had more money from plunder and their control over trading cities. Finally, against both their nomad rivals and their own military supporters, they had the inestimable political services of cities and the artisans, clerks, intellectuals, and religious leaders who lived in them. The combination of horse-warrior military power, cash revenues, imperial organization, and the services of urban elites put a temporary end to the territorial fragmentation and the social and cultural diversity of the elites of the early medieval period. As the Saljūks conquered territories to the west, their version of more general Eurasian political practices spread throughout the high medieval Middle East. While the political structure of the empire fragmented within a generation of its greatest extent, these practices were generally adopted by the warrior states that followed it. As was the case of the Jin and Liao empires, the central problem of the Saljūk state was to learn to exploit agrarian societies by ruling through local elites; and to make use of agrarian resources for personal benefits and to dominate and organize the horse-warriors upon whose military power they depended.

These larger developments defined the possibilities and constraints of the strategies of many local groups. This study will show how the elite households of one of the largest and most complex cities in the Islamic world experienced these larger changes and tried to survive through them. This approach is not an attempt to contribute to the formulation of a universal model of Islamic societies in this period or any other. If anything, one should expect that the specific nature of the cultural, political, and social struggles in Damascus would demolish any attempt to create such a model. Studies of other cities of the period would undoubtedly do the same. The era in which a single monograph can “explain Islam” to the West has ended. As the diffusion of Saljūk practices cannot be explained in religious terms such as the “Sunnī Revival,” the social and cultural history of cities in the heart of the Islamic world cannot be seen in purely religious terms. We must start from the bottom up and the inside out.

Even as we reject the study of cities and the groups that lived in them as local examples of larger religious developments, Damascus can be seen as an exceptionally well-documented example of relations among power, cultural practices, and social strategies characteristic of other cities in the Middle East in the period. Ancient Islamic scholarly, political, and social practices survived in Damascus as they did throughout the region. Damascus was also subjected to Saljūk forms of power, social control, and exploitation in a manner similar to

other cities throughout the Middle East. Damascus can thus be studied as a particular example of wider developments, even as it can never be set up as a model either for “Islam” or for a universal history of Muslim cities.

Damascus from Nûr al-Dîn through the Mamlûks

Beginning his career as ruler of a fragment of the Saljûk empire, when Nûr al-Dîn Zangî (511/1118–569/1174) entered Damascus in 549/1154, he established the city as an imperial capital for the first time in four centuries. In the Marwânîd period Damascus had been an imperial capital when it straddled the frontier between a reservoir of pastoral manpower and the agrarian-imperial regions of the Middle East. Its Arab rulers maintained an empire through a fusion of horse-warrior military power, imperial political practices, cash and land revenues, and monotheistic ideology. But their hegemony did not last long.

When Arabia was succeeded by Central Asia and Africa as sources of military manpower, Damascus lost its geopolitical importance. By the middle of the twelfth century the city had not been a major capital for many centuries. When empires formed over its horizons, in Fâtimid Egypt and Saljûk Iran and al-‘Irâq, Damascus became a distant object of contention between them, its politics oscillating between rule by its leading households and rule by an imperial governor and his garrison. At the center of the Islamic world, the city’s rulers were without the sources of manpower, the allure of plunder, and the ideological appeal of the border empires. Given the importance of warfare to Middle Eastern empire-building, for 400 years Damascus’ geographical centrality ensured its political marginality.²⁴

With the arrival of the crusaders in Syria beginning in 490/1097, Syria became once again a frontier region, now between the Latin West and South-West Asia. As the latest border region in the Muslim world, competition between Muslims and Crusaders (and later between Muslims and Mongols) set off the same empire-building process that had occurred on other frontiers. Nûr al-Dîn and the Ayyûbids and Mamlûks following him capitalized better than their rivals on the disorder caused by invasions of outsiders.²⁵ By fighting or promising to fight invaders, they gained a number of military and ideological advantages. The free-floating military resources of the Muslim world, including Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Mongols, border warriors, and

²⁴ The fundamental study of Syria in the Fâtimid period is T. Bianquis, *Damas et la Syrie sous la domination fatimide (359–468/969–1076). Essai d’interprétation de chroniques arabes médiévales*, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1986–1989). For further references to the history of Syria in the tenth and eleventh centuries see M.D. Yusuf, *Economic Survey of Syria during the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, in *Islamkundliche Untersuchungen*, Band 114 (Berlin, 1985), 12–23. See also E. Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam, Past and Present* (Princeton, 1985), 112–22.

²⁵ On Nûr al-Dîn see N. Elisséeff, *Nûr al-Dîn: un grand prince musulman de Syrie au temps des croisades (511–569 AH/1118–1174)*, 3 vols. (Damascus, 1967); H.A.R. Gibb, “The Career of Nûr al-Dîn,” in Setton, *A History of the Crusades*; H.E. Mayer, *The Crusades*, J. Gillingham trans. (Oxford, 1972).

freebooters, drifted to states that promised war. Booty and an increase in trade during the crusades also gave more cash to rulers. Ideologically, Zangids, Ayyūbids, and Mamlūks claimed the loyalties and resources of the cities as leaders of *jihād* (holy war), agents of the caliph, and supporters of Islam.

The strengthening of ruling institutions and solidarities through warfare brought into Syria political resources and practices that had previously existed on other frontiers. Syria beginning in the middle of the sixth/eleventh century was not subject to a distant capital, nor was it a collection of principalities or semi-autonomous governorships. It now became the core province of an empire, dominated by a collection of ruling households that recruited and balanced pastoralists, professional and slave troops, and urban elites. It held the central position in the empire only for a short time, and was eventually subordinated to Cairo, but throughout the period in question the city was the undoubted military and administrative center of Syria, and the second city of the empire.

Although Nūr al-Dīn, the Ayyūbids, and Mamlūks were all patrimonial rulers, they were nonetheless remote from the cities and villages they dominated. The warriors settled in Damascus' garrisons were for the most part slaves or pastoralists in origin. Alien to the city, their languages were unintelligible to civilians and their manners were often abhorrent to them.²⁶ Furthermore, because political power was vested in warrior households, not in state agencies, ruling groups only partially at best integrated the a'yān into a state apparatus.²⁷ In any case, no bureaucratic form of recruitment such as occurred in Sung China bridged the gap between ruling groups and subordinate elites.

Moreover, none of these regimes had a bureaucracy with a high organizational capacity. They could not rely on the diwāns for political tasks, either to control and coordinate their own followers or to administer the city.²⁸ In spite of the large number and specialized functions of the secretarial offices described by such authors as Nuwayrī and Qalqashandi, these offices did not constitute a bureaucracy in the Ottoman or even less the Sung meanings of the term. As scholars have long recognized, the affiliations of both writers to the sultanate should be kept in mind when we read their often idealistic descriptions of either the organizational power of the diwāns or the ability of the

²⁶ However, there was a group of amīrs who were known as faqīhs (al-fuqahā' mina'l-umarā'): Ibn Kathīr, 14/46. For a fine discussion of the attitudes of the 'ulamā' towards Turks in the fourteenth century see U. Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamlūks and their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *JSS* 33 (1988), 82–5. There were many soldiers who were local Syrians, but they appear not to have been well integrated into the regime, and little will be known of them until a study of the Syrian army is undertaken.

²⁷ On the administrative and economic functions of amīral households see Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 48–52. On the relative absence of specialized bureaucratic and administrative forms of administration see *ibid.*, 187.

²⁸ See Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 44–52 on the bureaucracy in Mamlūk Egypt and Syria, and Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 18–20 on the bureaucracy under Saladin.

sultān to administer his domains through them. The secretaries in the diwāns did not constitute a distinct social type comparable to the mandarin or the bureaucrat. As the chronicles and biographical dictionaries make abundantly clear, most holders of the highest positions in the diwāns in Damascus were recruited in this period from among existing learned or military elites.²⁹ The holders of these posts were not in this period a type of person noticeably different from the groups from which they were recruited. Secretaries, wazīrs, and the heads of other offices generally struggled for appointments by appealing to the major political and social households and networks of the city. There was no meritocratic recruitment, nor promotion from within the bureaucracy as professionals. They held these positions temporarily, with nothing approaching an ideology of bureaucratic tenure. They also had little if any notion of the independent and specialized nature of bureaucratic power as distinct from other forms of power.

Throughout the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods, clerks and secretaries financed and provisioned ruling and amīral households and their military dependants, oversaw the distribution of iqṭā's and other revenue sources, and paid themselves. They provided specialized services to military households in a complex society, especially in regular record-keeping and occasional cadastral surveys, both of which they apparently accomplished with precision. However, they were incapable of monopolizing either the acquisition of revenue or its distribution in pursuit of political goals. They were also socially unintrusive, and the cultural institutions of the city were neither linked to them nor under their control.³⁰ There were no bureaucratically organized state courts or registers of private property, and the day-to-day administration of justice in cities was generally left to qādīs – who were neither recruited nor supported by a bureaucratic structure of offices. The drawing up of contracts, the registry of land ownership, and the inspection of the markets were additional functions that the diwāns did not control. Finally, the diwāns did not work as a group to their own advantage in the manner of the Sung or Ottoman bureaucracies. They did not struggle collectively against other social groups, and Damascus experienced nothing like the bureaucratic usurpation of the income of religious groups, merchants, and charitable foundations characteristic of Sung China, and still less the Sung bureaucratic control over large sectors of

²⁹ There were some exceptions, such as the merchant who acquired the office of the kātib al-inshā', Safadi, *A'yān*, 52b. For the development of a civilian bureaucratic elite as a distinct social category in fifteenth-century Egypt, see Petry, *The Civilian Elite*, 200–20.

³⁰ For how patronage rather than bureaucracy defined Ayyūbid policies in Egypt, see I. Lapidus, "Ayyūbid Religious Policy and the Development of the Schools of Law in Cairo," in *Colloque International sur l'histoire du Caire* (Cairo, 1974), 279–85; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 186–8 for a more general statement. Cf. the Chinese bureaucracy under the Sung, which was capable of usurping revenues from charitable foundations and using them for its own purposes: Gernet, *Chinese Civilization*, 308. For a comparison with the Ottoman empire, where cultural institutions were supervised by a religious bureaucracy, see A. Ugur, *The Ottoman 'Ulemā in the mid-17th Century: an Analysis of the Vakā'i'l-Fuzala of Mehmed Seyhi Eff*, in *Islamkundliche Untersuchungen*, Band 131 (Berlin, 1986), xxxvii–lxxiv.

the economy. Only in the Ottoman period were the 'ulamā' integrated into a religious hierarchy under the partial supervision and control of the state. In Damascus, the combination of a monetized economy and a weak bureaucracy meant that ruling establishments could not command their soldiers or administer their cities through state agencies, but principally through the assignment of revenue sources.

Political power in the period was not exercised by agencies that held specific and differentiated functions. It was rather diffused in whole packages among the amīrī households of the city, each of which had a similar structure and exercised power through similar practices. The relative power of these households fluctuated, at times quite rapidly, and the numbers of dependants any one of them could support for specialized services differed. But even sultāns were never capable of leveling down the amīrs, specializing their functions into purely military ones, and placing an effective administrative machinery over them. The a'yān supported rulers by giving them a channel of influence into cities, and by providing them with a notion of just rule. But the a'yān could not give rulers a bureaucratic state structure or social order. Among the a'yān the specialized powers and functions characteristic of bureaucracies later and elsewhere were more often held by single individuals and their households for short periods. In the cases of the a'yān and amīrs alike, it was the diffusion of power among their households that made fitna an ever-present reality.³¹ One consequence of this diffusion of power among elite households was the ever-present possibility of fitna. To rulers the "quelling" or "quieting" (ikhmād or taskīn) of fitna – among amīrs and a'yān alike – became one of the principal arts of ruling.³²

"Public" and "private" power

The politics of the high medieval period were shaped by two partly contradictory imperatives. Ayyūbid and Mamlūk rulers in principle denied their military supporters any autonomy or derived sovereignty. Rulers also considered most wealth their own. Because they could make political use of troops recruited from among pastoral peoples, of cities, officials, and money, rulers prevented amīrs from controlling the agricultural surplus directly.³³ At the same time, however, as was true of horse-warrior regimes elsewhere, rulers could not dominate their military supporters through *force majeure*, in spite of

³¹ For Mamlūk military factionalism see Irwin, *The Middle East*, ii.

³² For the sultān's "quelling" (ikhmād) of fitna among amīrs in 693/1294 see Jazarī, BN MS, 221, 230; for the quelling of civilian fitna over the use of the Umayyad Mosque in 694/1294–5 see *ibid.*, 302–3. Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-āshā* (Cairo, 1914–28), 12/43 listed the quelling of outbreaks of fitna (*burūq al-fitna*) as one of the four duties of the chief qādī. See also chapter 5, note 127.

³³ See Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 15–18, on the absence of subinfeudation and Saladin's assertion of control over the *iqṭā'*.

the training and resources of royal troops. Instead, they negotiated, adjudicated, and played military commands (*imra*) and factions (*ta'ifa*; pl. *tawā'if*) off against one another. While under a strong ruler the subordinate amirs were kept in check, the ruling household's dominance was usually precarious.³⁴ The ruling household, composed of the ruler, his family and dependants, his mamlūks and military supporters, and a few dependent but not administratively subordinate amirs and civilians, was itself one player in the political competition of the city. Moreover, all ruling households of the period began as households of amirs, and never lost their original character entirely.

This tension – between the claims to sovereignty of ruling groups and their practical dependence on their clients and supporters – was the defining problem of politics in the Latin West as well. The various regions of the Latin West and the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk empires were ruled by small and exclusive horse-warrior elites. In both cases bureaucracies were weak compared with early modern states or imperial China. Rulers in both areas governed indirectly, often through religious leaders or military magnates. In both cases, because horse-warriors controlled land, political power was fragmented. However, the form political fragmentation took differed between the two.

In the Latin West, more than in many other Eurasian societies, military service was associated with land tenure and a host of other social and political functions: “fief et justice sont tout un.” The aristocracy had titles to their land holdings, hereditary privileges, the legal status of nobility, territorial supremacy, and judicial rights over peasants. Beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Europe, they became a self-reproducing elite by their control over property within patrilineal lines of descent. Much of this was also true of Japan between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁵

In high medieval Syria, by contrast, sultans and governors had the political resources to frustrate other social bodies' independent possession of power or wealth. Rulers made claims that rulers in the Latin West did not and generally could not. Ayyūbids and Mamlūks prevented their military supporters from appropriating the surplus directly, partly by paying them in cash, and mainly through the *iqtā'*, or the revocable land grant, in return for service. In Syria, from 1190 onward, service was associated with temporary control of the usufruct of the land.³⁶ Amirs with few exceptions had no hereditary rights to

³⁴ Irwin, *The Middle East*, 85–94, 152–9. ³⁵ Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, 61–84.

³⁶ Syria under Nūr al-Din and Saladin was an exception to the usual forms of *iqtā'*, as these rulers allowed *iqtā'*s to become hereditary: Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 42–3, 371–5; C. Cahen, “L'évolution de l'*iqtā'* du IXe au XIIIe siècle: Contribution à une histoire comparée des sociétés médiévales,” *Annales E.S.C.* 8, no. 1 (1953), 44–5; A.K.S. Lambton, “Reflections on the *Iqtā'*,” in G. Makdisi ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Leiden, 1965), 372. But this generally ended during the reign of al-‘Adil, who made eliminating the autonomy of his father's commanders the central policy of his regime: Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 141–5. There remained a few exceptions, such as the military family known as the Amīr al-Gharb settled near Beirut. They held their territories until the mid-fourteenth century, even increasing them following the cadastral survey (*rawk*) of Tankiz: see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 12/362–4; Ibn Hajar, 2/54.

property. Instead, they had temporary franchises to collect revenue at its source.³⁷

Property was not generally controlled by lineages, but by the military entourage of a powerful amir or ruler (*halqa* or *khāṣṣikīyya*), important amirs, and military factions. Although in the early Ayyūbid period some iqṭā's were hereditary, military lineages rarely acquired "rights" of possession of property. The beneficiaries of iqṭā's formed within and around the households of amirs and sultāns, and often survived long after the death of the founder himself.³⁸ Because iqṭā's were given to individuals, these groups often became factions when their patron died and his iqṭā's were redistributed. Amirs had limited and temporary roles in local leadership and the administration of justice, no legal status or hereditary privileges, and no title deeds to the properties from which they derived their income. Instead, many were stationed in garrisons in fortified cities. Although amirs sometimes spent time in their iqṭā's, to oversee the harvest or pasture their horses, the Syrian warrior elite claimed nothing like the "rights" of a feudal nobility, nor do they seem to have sentimentalized country life. Syria in the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods had none of the parcelized sovereignty, subinfeudation, or vassal hierarchies characteristic of feudalism in the Latin West. In short, in medieval Syria, warrior elites were generally not hereditary, landed, or aristocratic.³⁹

Thus, where horse-warriors in the high medieval Latin West parcelized power spatially, in the Middle East horse-warriors fragmented power factionally. In neither case did ruling establishments possess a monopoly of coercive power. Rulers in the Middle East wielded the political resources to garrison critical fractions of their military support in cities. Yet in spite of their apparent dominance Middle Eastern rulers could neither recruit nor support warriors and their horses through an administrative apparatus comparable to that of Sung China. Rulers stayed on top, and "usurpers" got there, by

³⁷ On the iqṭā' see D. Ayalon, "The System of Payment in Mamlūk Military Society," *JESHO* 1 (1957–8), 61; Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 371–5; Irwin, "Iqṭā' and the End of the Crusader States," 62–77; Irwin, *The Middle East*, 11, 109–11, 137–47; A.N. Poliak, *Feudalism in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and the Lebanon, 1250–1900* (London, 1939); Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 46; H. Rabie, *The Financial System of Egypt, A.H. 564–741/A.D. 1169–1341* (London, 1972); H. Rabie, "The Size and Value of the Iqṭā' in Egypt 564–741 A.H./1169–1341 A.D.," in M.A. Cook ed., *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East From the Rise of Islam to the Present Day* (London, 1970), 129–38; for the distinction between the iqṭā' al-imra and the iqṭā' al-halqa see Safadi, *A'yan*, 141a. For a failed attempt by an amir's sons to inherit his iqṭā', claiming to be *fi bikār* – a Persian word meaning that they were combatants – see Jazari, BN MS, 445; also *ibid.*, 450 on the importance of *bikār*.

³⁸ See Irwin, *The Middle East*, 28, for examples of "factions" (in war they could just as easily be rendered as "regiments") – the Ṣāliḥīs, 'Azīzīs, Nāṣīrīs, Qaymāris, among others – that originated in (and took their names from) households of amirs. The royal mamlūks, as Ayalon's many articles show, were attached directly to the sultān and can be considered as a larger and more complex version of the military households of amirs.

³⁹ On comparisons of the iqṭā' with European feudalism, see Cahen, "L'évolution de l'Iqṭā'," 50–1; Cahen, "Réflexions sur l'usage du mot 'Féodalité,'" *JESHO* 3 (1960), 7–20; Lambton, "Reflections on the Iqṭā'," 358–76. For European notions of "rights of possession," see J.P. Lévy, *Histoire de la Propriété* (Paris, 1972).

manipulating commands and factions that were neither wholly autonomous nor wholly dominated.⁴⁰

This difference between the two civilizations also appears in the character of social bonds. Warriors in the Latin West and high medieval Syria both traded “service” (Arabic: *khidma*) for “benefit” (Latin: *beneficium*; Arabic: *ni'ma* or *fā'ida*). Both tied themselves to their patrons through oaths, and through a language of personal affection taken from the household.⁴¹ But these groups conceived of their loyalties differently. In the Latin West these bonds were private, contractual, and hereditary legal ties of vassalage. In high medieval Syria and Egypt, amīrs were settled in urban garrisons and attached to one another through acquired ties of affective intimacy. The bonds of loyalty within groups of ethnic outsiders, among mamlūks of the same cohort (*khushdāhiyya*), and between mamlūks and their masters and manumitters (*ustādhs*) were proverbial for their intimacy.⁴² A mamlūk to his master was said to be like an “indivisible particle,” as a sultān could say of an old comrade, “he is of my cohort (*khushdāshī*); he and I are a single thing.”⁴³ However, although these ties were politically useful, they were at the same time unpredictable. The open social space that made such personal ties possible to establish also made them easier to break, and in practice the first task of an individual upon rising was to eliminate his possible rivals, which often meant precisely his cohort.⁴⁴ The rulers of the period, from Zangi through Saladin to many of the Ayyūbids and Mamlūks, including all founders of “dynasties,” were amīrs, temporary commanders of loose and shifting formations. Their ties to their military supporters were not contractual so much as affectual. Where the relationship of the slave to his master was formalized as clientage or *walā'*, their mutual obligations were not enforceable through law. Rulers and amīrs had no legal status or complex of rights comparable to lordship or *dominium* in the Latin West.

⁴⁰ The politics of the military faction was characteristic of many other regimes in the pre-Ottoman Middle East, and had social and cultural consequences that went well beyond politics. From the garrisons of post-conquest 'Irāq, Syria, and Khurasān, to 'Abbāsid Baghādād and Mamlūk Damascus and Cairo, a defining characteristic of the Islamic period was rivalry between military commands in urban garrisons on the one hand and ruling groups on the other. This rivalry had effects that went beyond politics. A subject that cannot be considered here, but one that deserves further investigation, is the emergence of the important religious and sectarian movements of the Islamic world out of social and political struggles in garrisons. Shi'ism, the Marwānid ghulāt, Khārijism, the 'Abbāsid movement, and Hanbalism all seem to have appeared in garrisons within the context of competition between ruling groups and warriors.

⁴¹ For oaths (*tahli*) among mamlūk amīrs renewed in a political crisis see for example Jazārī, BN MS, 394–5. Cf. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 42–62.

⁴² On khushdāhiyya see D. Ayalon, “L’Esclavage du Mamlouk,” *Oriental Notes and Studies* 1 (Jerusalem, 1951), 29–31; Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 34.

⁴³ Safadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/208: al-juz' alladhi lā yatajazā'; Ibn Kathir, 13/348; for another example of the political mobilization of ties of khushdāhiyya see Jazārī, BN MS, 481.

⁴⁴ See Irwin, *The Middle East*, 88–90; P.M. Holt, “Mamlūks,” *EI* (2), 326. Cf. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 84–5.

Warrior households and outsiders in high medieval Syria

Rule by warrior households and competition among them characterized both the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods. Modern historians have generally drawn a sharp division between the two periods, and have treated them separately as distinct dynastic eras.⁴⁵ One reason for this division is that leadership tainted by slavery so appalled European sensibilities that to many writers it was self-evident that Mamlūk rule constituted a new and distinct form of state power.⁴⁶ This perception has a long history in European accounts of the medieval Middle East. As one eighteenth-century writer put it, “I could not say much of the Mamalucs, of whom I know no author that has written in particular; neither did they deserve that any should. For they were a base sort of people, a Colluvies of slaves, the scum of all the East, who, having treacherously destroyed the Jobidae, their Masters, reigned in their stead.”⁴⁷ Gibbon had a similar horror of rule by slave soldiers, though he expressed it in slightly more measured language: “a more unjust and absurd constitution cannot be devised than that which condemns the natives of a country to perpetual servitude, under the arbitrary domination of strangers and slaves.”⁴⁸ Abhorrence of slave rule has characterized much European scholarship since.⁴⁹

Correspondingly, it is Western scholars who have been simultaneously confused over the nature of legitimate sovereignty and the strongest advocates

⁴⁵ See P.M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades. The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London and New York, 1986), 138, for an recent example of a scholar who stresses the break between the two. He contrasts an Ayyūbid dynastic principle to an “elective” Mamlūk sultanate, the Mamlūk amīrs “constituting an informal electoral college,” *ibid.*, 141. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 11, for another recent scholar who has discerned a “dynastic principle” governing the Ayyūbid succession. Cf. Irwin, *The Middle East*, 26.

⁴⁶ On recruitment of mamlūk troops and Mamlūk relations between state and society in general see Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, and “The Structure of Government in the Mamlūk Sultanate,” in Holt, *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands*; D. Ayalon, “Studies on the structure of the Mamluk Army,” *BSOAS* 15 (1953), 203–28, 448–76; 16 (1954); Ayalon, “The Muslim City and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy,” 311–28; Ayalon, *The Mamlūk Military Society* (London, 1979); Ayalon, “The Euro-Asiatic Steppe”; Ayalon, “The Wāfiyya in the Mamlūk Kingdom,” *IC* 25 (1951); Ayalon, “The System of Payment in Mamlūk Military Society,” 37–65, 257–96; Ayalon, “Aspects of the Mamlūk Phenomenon: Ayyūbids, Kurds, and Turks,” *Der Islam* 54 (1974), 1–32; Irwin, *The Middle East*, 1–18; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 44–79. On domination by military slaves in the Middle East in the imperial and medieval periods see Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 74–91; D. Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: the Genesis of a Military System* (New Haven and London, 1981). For medieval Latin reactions to military slavery see N. Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London, 1975), 221–2.

⁴⁷ Anon., *The Life of the Reverend Humphrey Prideaux, D.D., Dean of Norwich* (London, 1748), quoted in P. M. Holt, “The Position and Power of the Mamlūk Sultān,” *BSOAS* 37, no. 2 (1975), 327.

⁴⁸ E. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, 1907), vol. X, 322–3.

⁴⁹ See for a typical example Lane-Poole’s description of Baybars’ success: “The slave had risen (by a twofold murder of his leaders, it is true) to become the greatest sultan of his century,” S. Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt: the Middle Ages* (London, 1901), 272; also Critchley, *Feudalism*, 48.

of an Ayyūbid legitimism.⁵⁰ However, the legal status of the mamlūk as opposed to the “free” Kurdish, Arab, “Turkish,” or Mongol warrior or ruler does not attract much attention in the sources, though some grumbling about the slave origins of Mamlük rulers was recorded.⁵¹ What troubled medieval writers was perhaps less the “ignoble” and illegitimate origins of mamlūk rulers than the rupturing of patron-client bonds that was an inescapable possibility in the politics of fitna. In both the Mamlük and Ayyūbid periods the most militarily powerful and politically important soldiers were outsiders recruited with cash, and in both periods the heads of ruling households balanced slave soldiers and free-born troops. Even in the Mamlük period, the various “free” Kurds, Turks, and Mongols who migrated to Mamlük domains (and were integrated into Mamlük politics in groups) tended to be as politically and militarily effective as mamlūk troops and amīrs.⁵² In both periods the loyalties of warriors were to their comrades and patrons, though the nature of the bond of the free-born warrior to his patron differed somewhat from that of the manumitted slave to his master.⁵³

With the exception of some differences in the manner by which ties of loyalty were expressed, mamlūks resembled free troops in that they were one more military resource brought in by ruling groups who had the cash to recruit them. The difference between the political-military organization of the Middle East and the Latin West was not so much the employment of slave soldiers that scholars have seen as emblematic of high medieval Middle Eastern politics. It lay rather in the relatively greater preponderance in the Middle East of garrisoned commands of ethnic outsiders who were recruited with cash.⁵⁴ The

⁵⁰ For examples see the account of the “usurpation of supreme power” by the Mamlūks in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn. (1911), s.v. “Mameluke”; H. Massé, *Islam*, H. Edib trans. (New York, 1938), 232, in which, discussing Atabeks, Seljūkids, and Ayyūbids he wrote, “Strangely enough, all these dynasties died of the same disease: the Praetorian Disease.” Perry Anderson also stresses slave troops as one of the major distinguishing characteristics of medieval Islamic societies: *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 505–6. Medieval Latin writers had a different view of Ayyūbid legitimacy: they rejected it, seeing al-Malik al-Ādil (“Saphadin”) as the “disinheritor of his cousins and usurper of the kingdoms of Asia,” because he was the brother of Saladin and not his lineal descendant: Oliver of Damietta, *The Capture of Damietta*, J.J. Gavigan trans. in E. Peters, *Christian Society and the Crusades, 1198–1229* (Philadelphia, 1948), 70. A final example of the confusion that the search for dynastic legitimacy has produced is a rejection of Saladin himself as a “usurper”: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 7th edn. (1842), vol. VIII, 483.

⁵¹ Irwin, *The Middle East*, 27, for a bedouin “rebellion” in Upper Egypt in 1250, defended as a refusal to accept rule by slaves.

⁵² On these groups – the wāfiyya – and their importance see Irwin, *The Middle East*, 51–3, 71, 90–1, 94, 100, and esp. 108, in which Irwin makes the intriguing suggestion that it was the dwindling of immigrants in the first quarter of the thirteenth century that was responsible for a greater need to purchase mamlūks. See *ibid.*, 18, on how the Mamlūks (like the Ayyūbids before them) balanced both slave-born and free-born troops. Cf. D. Ayalon’s pioneering study, “The Wāfiyya,” 81–104.

⁵³ On similarities between Ayyūbid and Mamlük military structures, see Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 7.

⁵⁴ For another example of a state that lost control of land and came increasingly to rely on ethnic outsiders see S. Vryonis Jr., “Manpower in Byzantine and Turkish Societies,” in Parry and Yapp, *War, Technology, and Society*, 126–8.

recruitment of slaves as soldiers in large numbers – as original and distinctive as it is – may thus be a special case of a wider phenomenon. The long history of Europeans' horror at slave rule may have reflected an even greater terror – the uncoupling of descent and status in a society more monetized than their own.

As recruitment and the organization of military power were not drastically different in the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods, neither was leadership. In both periods it was amīrs who established ruling households, and who made irregular and usually feeble ventures to establish their sons as their successors. This was largely true of the Ayyūbid and Qalāwūnid ruling households, both of which were short-lived alliances of powerful amīrs and the sons, households, and dependants of the leaders of one of the dominant commands. Sultāns were dependent to a large degree on one warrior faction or another, and they rarely if ever enjoyed universal assent to their legitimacy. When amīrs became rulers, other amīrs continued to look upon them as one among equals. In fitnas, ruling households often found themselves one faction among several.⁵⁵ In both the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods, the ruling household's lack of transcendent legitimacy, or of decisive power, meant that the death of the ruler often resulted in fitna. Warfare ended only when one amīr or another was able to mobilize political capital and military solidarities to confirm the previous household or establish a new one.

European historiography, by taking the personal status of the soldier and the pattern of succession to be main points of difference between Ayyūbids and Mamlūks, has overemphasized the "dynastic" aspect of differences between the two. Ayyūbid rulers and Mamlūk governors had the prestige and resources of the sultanate behind them, but in both periods it was rule by warrior households and competition among them that defined the political arena. In spite of the obvious differences between these regimes, in neither period did rulers have the decisive power or uncontested legitimacy to impose a "system of government" that would level the competing amīral households beneath an effective administrative apparatus. Rather, in both periods domination was a prize that was continuously contested.

Western scholars may no longer see sultāns and amīrs as kings and barons, as did earlier travelers; however, we continue to impute European political practices and mentalities to high medieval Middle Eastern peoples.⁵⁶ The continuous reshuffling of power and resources is one reason why Europeans have seen the politics of the period to be a disorderly and corrupt "tormented

⁵⁵ For one example see Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 32, for Saladin's political position as a co-equal among a group of amīrs.

⁵⁶ For a fourteenth-century traveler who recast Mamlūk politics into such European concepts and language, see L. Frescobaldi, *Viaggi in Terra Santa* (Florence, 1862), 25. See also Lord Kinross, *Portrait of Egypt* (London, 1966), 86, for the survival of such concepts. One should point out that as Europeans have dropped "kings" and "barons" from their vocabulary, a recent scholar found "feudalism," "feudal knights," "bourgeoisie," "lumpenproletariat," "mayors," "town militias," "consuls," and "urban republics" in the medieval Middle East: E. Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (London, 1976).

recital of intrigues.⁵⁷ When ruling groups composed of horse-warriors had resources in cash and outside manpower, most wealth, power, and prestige became objects of unending competition. In the Ayyūbid and early Mamlūk periods, amīrs and members of ruling households jostled for power and resources. When they acquired them they could not contrive a permanent legal, divine, or natural “right” to them. Legitimacy in this setting was a prize like all other objects of competition. Fitna was less a temporary breakdown of legitimate political or social order than the inescapable environment, and even the very substance, of elite social life – both military and civilian. It imposed its logic on their social and political relationships and ways of seeing the world.⁵⁸

Rulers, soldiers, and cities

Composed largely of outsiders, the warriors who ruled the city administered it indirectly. Scholars now agree that the notion of “oriental despotism” exaggerated both the power of ruling groups and the helplessness of urban elites before them.⁵⁹ Dominant but maladroit, the ruling groups of Damascus neither developed intrusive state agencies nor ruled by contracting with autonomous corporate groups – these they did not allow to exist. Warriors could not administer the city themselves. Yet they not only barred urban elites from securing corporate autonomies, but following Nūr al-Dīn they actively set out to reduce the power of a‘yān households. In consequence, ruling groups “administered” by learning to make use of the city’s existing social and political practices.⁶⁰

One way of understanding how the ruling elite inserted itself into the city is by examining their building programs. Rulers of the city did not assimilate its topography to a preexisting image of power. Throughout the period, in spite of an active patronage that brought about an “architectural florescence,” there were few projects on an imperial scale.⁶¹ Rather, households of ruling elites colonized existing space by building on open lots, by establishing

⁵⁷ G. Wiet, *L’Egypte arabe*, 337, quoted by Humphreys in *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 414, note 12.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of fitna within the monetized political context of the medieval Middle East and Mughal India, a discussion from which I have benefited greatly, and one which deserves the widest possible audience among historians of the medieval Islamic world, see A. Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India. Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarājya* (Cambridge, 1986), 21–34, 379–88. For the military factionalism of the Mamlūk period see Irwin, *The Middle East*, 152–9. For armed struggle between Venetians and Genoese seen by a contemporary author as fitna see Jazari, BN MS, 241–2.

⁵⁹ On Oriental Despotism see Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 463–5, 503–6; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 1–8, 185.

⁶⁰ See Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 44–78, for the roles of the Mamlūk elite in the administration of the city.

⁶¹ R. S. Humphreys, “Politics and Architectural Patronage in Ayyūbid Damascus,” in C.E. Bosworth et al. eds., *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times. Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Princeton, 1989), 151–74; Humphreys, “The Expressive Intent of Mamlūk Architecture in Cairo,” *SI* 35 (1972), 79, 83, 85.

household charitable foundations in palaces and houses, and by restoring the important religious buildings of the city, such as the Umayyad Mosque.⁶² When the ruling household or powerful amīrs altered the street plan of the city, it was usually for military or religious purposes – to build fortifications, level dens of iniquity, and clear the right of way, often to make it easier to walk to the mosque. Rarely did they integrate a street plan and major buildings with an image of power. Ayyūbid and Mamlūk urbanism was largely an intrusive and opportunistic architecture of single buildings.⁶³

Rulers' political theater and use of sacred objects was also rarely on a grand scale. As they had cleared out no new imperial spaces, and built more often for the civilian elite than for themselves, the rulers of Damascus rarely put on large-scale ritual ceremonies.⁶⁴ In contrast to other Middle Eastern imperial rulers before and since, Ayyūbids and Mamlūks rarely cast themselves as actors in sacralized imperial performances. They were more often a privileged audience for ritual performances enacted by others. The rulers of the city fit themselves into its existing ceremonial geography and ritual idioms. They made appearances at the major religious festivals, especially the *mahmal*, the inauguration of religious foundations, and the funerals of scholars and sūfis.⁶⁵

⁶² On such works see for examples Ibn Kathīr, 13/64, 75; 14/143, 144, 148, 154; Jazārī, *Tā'rikh*, Köprülü Kütüphanesi MS 1037, fol. 145; Ibn Shākir, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano Arabo MS, fol. 121; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt al-wafayāt*, Muhibb al-Dīn 'Abd al-Hamid ed., 2 vols. (Cairo, 1951), 1/242–5; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 10/339–42; 13/423–4.

⁶³ The only attempt to undertake an even vaguely imperial urbanism in the period was Nūr al-Dīn's. The dār al-hadīth al-Nūriyya was a major project, involving the destruction of many houses, a bath, and a bakery: Nu'aymī, *al-Dāris fī tā'rikh al-mudāris* (Damascus, 1367–70/1948–51), 1/99–100. The Ḥanafī madrasa founded by Nūr al-Dīn was built on the remains of the Umayyad Caliph Hishām's palace, the "last Caliph," as Ibn Shaddād, *al-A'laq al-Khaṭīra*, S. Dahān ed. (Damascus, 1956), 2/203–4 put it, and as some Syrians must have seen it; Nu'aymī, 1/610; Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla* (Beirut, 1964), 286; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Rihla Ibn Baṭṭūṭa al-masāmā tuḥfa al-nuzzār wa 'ajāib al-ṭasfār*, vol. I (Beirut, 1981), 1/221; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tā'rikh*, C.J. Thorneberg ed. (Beirut, 1965), 11/264; N. Elisséeff, "Les Monuments de Nur al-Din," *BEO* 13 (1949–51), 5–43; J. Sauvaget and M. Eochard, *Les monuments Ayyoubides de Damas*, (Paris, 1938–1950), vol. 2, p. 88. For another reference to Hishām's palace see Jazārī, BN MS, 242–3. Nūr al-Dīn, perhaps more than his predecessors, tried to demonstrate his reliance on civilians, explicitly eliminating many of the signs of power of other imperial rulers, such as the use of door-keepers and chamberlains. See Nu'aymī, 1/611; Y. al-Tabba, "The Architectural Patronage of Nūr al-Dīn (1146–1174)," Ph.D. Dissertation (New York University, 1982).

⁶⁴ Fātimid Cairo and 'Abbāsid Baghdād present instructive contrasts. See R.S. Humphreys, "Mamlūk Architecture," 85–6; M. Canard, "Le cérémonial fatimide et le cérémonial byzantin: essai de comparaison," *Byzantion* 21 (1951), 355–420; P. Sanders, "From Court Ceremony to Urban Language: Ceremonial in Fātimid Cairo and Fustāt," in Bosworth et al., *The Islamic World*, 311–21; Sanders, "The Court Ceremonial of the Fātimid Caliphate in Egypt," Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1984). For ceremonial in the 'Abbāsid period see D. Sourdel, "Questions de cérémonial 'abbaside," *REI* 28 (1960), 121–48; al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-tāj*, trans. by C. Peilat as *Livre de la couronne* (Paris, 1954).

⁶⁵ Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 297, 455, 500, 522, 530, 593. On the mahmal or mahmil generally see J. Jomier, *Le Mahmal et la caravane des pèlerins de la Mecque XIII–XX siècles* (Cairo, 1953). For the funeral in 708/1308–9 of a fairly obscure sūfi ascetic (lā yā'kul al-khubz) who lived in a village outside of the city that was nonetheless attended by the governor, the qādīs, and a group of the a'yan see Ibn Kathīr, 14/48. For another see Jazārī, BN MS, 196.

They also supported and visited the sacred points in the religious geography of the city, such as the major shrines and the important holy men and scholars.⁶⁶ What might be termed the audience state of Damascus derived its legitimacy by observing, supporting, and applauding others' performances, but rarely by enacting themselves the sacred dramas characteristic of a number of other pre-modern states.⁶⁷

Sultans had few if any of the attributes of sacred kingship. They had few ritual functions or duties, no numinous properties, no sacral powers of healing or rule-making, nor any privileged relation to the divine. Unable to assert control over the sacred, rulers had rather to negotiate the use of it from others who were its arbiters. Al-Ashraf's purchase of a sandal said to have belonged to the Prophet is one illustration of the ideological dependence of rulers upon the learned elite. Al-Ashraf bought the relic from the family who owned it, intending to wear it around his neck for its grace or *baraka*. But in the end he could not exploit such sacred objects himself. Instead, the 'ulamā' prevailed upon him to establish the dār al-ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya as a setting for the object.⁶⁸

Scholars have often drawn a fairly strict division between civilians and warriors. The dependence of warriors on the a'yān, however, induced many soldiers to adopt their culture and participate in it as best they could. When Baybars styled himself a scholar ('ālim) this was just one obvious example of the cultural dependence of amirs.⁶⁹ Princes, rulers, governors, amirs and members of their households associated themselves with ṣūfis and learned men and women. Many ruling elites not only patronized learning, but tried to acquire it themselves. They studied with learned people, wrote books, held audiences for the transmission of 'ilm (*majlis al-'ilm*), and gave ijāzas.⁷⁰ Great

⁶⁶ Ibn Kathīr, 13/52, 346.

⁶⁷ For the classic study of the "theater state" see C. Geertz, *Negara: the Theater State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980).

⁶⁸ Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS. 106, 134; Ibn Kathīr, 13/135, 147; Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mir'āt al-zamān*, 4 vols. (Hyderabad, 1374-80/1954-61), 2/45, 46; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/177; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān fī tārīkh al-a'yān* (Hyderabad, 1370/1952), 8/713.

⁶⁹ Ibn Kathīr, 13/238. For other amirs and rulers who styled themselves "'ālim," see Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 81a. See also al-Malik al-Kāmil, described as one who "loved" the learned, and who "was among them as one of them" (wa-hwa ma'ahum ka-wāhid minhum): Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, 6 vols. M. 'Abd al-Hamid ed. (Cairo, 1948), 4/172. For an excellent exploratory study of Mamlūk culture in the fourteenth century, see Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage," 86-101.

⁷⁰ For examples see the amir who held a majlis which was attended by 'ulamā', poets, and notables: Nu'aymī, 1/66. Many Ayyūbid princes represented themselves as learned. Ayyūbid princes attended ḥadīth sessions and studied various fields, including theology (*kalām*) and Hellenistic sciences (*al-'ulūm al-awā'il*: "sciences of the ancients"): Abu Shāma, *Dhayl*, 179, 195; Ibn Kathīr, 13/198; Nu'aymī, 1/317, 318, 531; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/419. For princes and amirs who composed or copied books see Ibn Wāsil, *Mufarrīj al-kurūb fī akhbār banī ayyūb* (Cairo, 1953), 4/78, 210-11; Nu'aymī, 1/65; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/577. For a prince who gave an ijaza to a scholar see Ibn Kathīr, 13/274. For a learned Turkish amir who held sessions of ḥadīth see Nu'aymī, 1/67. For the cultivation of religious learning among mamlūks see Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 146-60; Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage," 85-96, 103-14.

warriors also liked to be seen giving deference to great scholars, sitting, “like students,” before them.⁷¹

Ruling households also fit themselves into existing practices of political domination and social control. In spite of their political dominance in the city, Nūr al-Dīn, the Ayyūbids, and the Mamlūks only occasionally introduced intrusive state agencies. The diwāns rarely penetrated or coordinated even the ruling elite, much less the lower orders. Instead, rulers tried to gain control over the semi-autonomous offices (*wazīfa*, pl. *wazā'if* or *manṣab*, pl. *manāṣib*) hitherto in the hands of the a'yān.⁷² These included, in addition to the manṣabs of the shaykh (mashyakha) of a dār al-ḥadīth or the *mudarris* (lecturer) of a *madrasa* (place of reading or lecture), such offices as the various judges or qādīs, the market inspector or *muhtasib*, the administrators of charitable foundations, the supervisor of the treasury, and later included the administrator of the holy cities of the Hijāz.⁷³ Few of these offices in Syria were integrated into the diwāns, though the heads of the diwāns were also known as holders of manṣabs or *wazīfas*. The social power of the manṣab-holder was not derived from the impersonal authority of the office, but from the prestige of the office-holder. When rulers made appointments to them it was not from within the bureaucracy but from among civilian elites who had religious prestige or political capital.

In the early Mamlūk period the a'yān faced a number of attempts to place the city's religious office under the control of Cairo. Appointments were made directly from Cairo, bypassing the local a'yān and amīrs. The chief qādīship was taken away from the sole control of the Shāfi'i chief qādī, and each of the four madhhabs was given its own chief qādī. The justification advanced in Cairo for this reform was that the Shāfi'i qādī had become lazy. However, there are several reasons to interpret it as an attempt to increase control over the city. First, it was applied to several cities in the empire. Second, the measure was resisted in Damascus by some of the religious elite, which it likely would not have been had it had no political aim. It was also popularly ridiculed in a ditty composed for the occasion: “The people of Damascus are sceptical/ of the number of judges; They are all suns [the honorific of each qādī was Shams al-Dīn, Sun of Religion]/ but their true state (ḥāl) is in the shadows; Whenever a sun is named qādī/ the shadows increase; Though our qādīs are all suns/ we remain in the darkest shadow.” This measure also took place in the context of other policies intended to give the Mamlūks greater leverage over the a'yān. Around the same time there were

⁷¹ Jazārī, *Gotha Ducale* MS 1560, year 680.

⁷² In other periods of Islamic history the terms manṣab and *wazīfa* seem to have had distinct meanings. In Damascus in this period it was possible for any monetized honor or office to be referred to by either term. This study will generally use the term manṣab for clarity.

⁷³ For offices in Damascus in the Mamlūk period see Qalqashandi, esp. vol. XII of the eighteen-volume set; Subki, *Mu'īd al-nī'am wa mubid al-niqām*, D. Myhrman ed. (London, 1908); W. Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans 1382–1468 A.D. Systematic Notes to Ibn Taghrit Birdi's Chronicles of Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955–8); M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *La Syrie à l'époque des mamelouks* (Paris, 1923); Nuwayrī, *Nihāya al-arab fi funūn al-adab*, vol. VIII (Cairo, 1931).

offices established to oversee religious foundations and office-holders, and the local garrison commander (*wālī al-shurṭa*) reduced the stipends of all religious manṣāb-holders save those who supported him. However, these attempts to install an intermediate level of organization (if that is what they were) between Cairo and Damascus died out, and there is little mention of them in the sources later.⁷⁴

Waqf and the household

Rulers and amīrs rewarded civilians through various means, including stipends and prizes, but it was principally through the waqf ahlī (or waqf ahliyya) or household religious foundation that they supported the a‘yān whom they needed to rule.⁷⁵ Waqf in Islamic law means immobilization of property for religious ends.⁷⁶ It was the sole relatively secure means of protecting property from seizure. It also provided a legal fiction by which property could at least temporarily be passed on through single lines of descent.⁷⁷ Because property could be safeguarded best by tying it to a religious purpose, waqf became one of the major tools in the political and social strategies of the a‘yān and warriors alike. It was not a mechanism of administration, but ruling elite households made use of it for political ends.

The principal waqfs founded by sultānāl and amīral households in high medieval Damascus were madrasas, usually thought of as “law colleges,” and occasionally as “universities.” An earlier generation of scholars, including the great Islamicists Berchem and Goldziher, saw madrasas as instruments of state power. They associated a number of developments, including the triumph of Ash‘arite Sunnism, the ideological defeat of Shī‘ism, and the restoration of the caliphate during the “Sunnī Revival,” with the foundation of madrasas. While this explanation seemed to work reasonably well, George Makdisi and a number of modern scholars have discredited much of it.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 218, 226, 236; Ibn Kathīr, 13/245, 246; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 136; Lapidus, “Ayyūbid Religious Policy,” 282.

⁷⁵ For examples of stipends granted directly, see Ibn Abī Uṣaybī‘a, ‘Uyūn al-anbā‘ fī ṭabaqāt al-ṭūibā‘ (Beirut, 1965), 660, 661; Ṣafadi, *al-Wāfi*, 10/264 recorded a stipend granted by the sultān to an Egyptian scholar that went to “his sons, and the sons of his sons, forever (li-awlādihī wa-li-awlād awlādihī abadān),” but such a hereditary stipend was rare.

⁷⁶ On waqf see H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers eds., *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1953), s.v. waqf, 627; E. Clavel, *Le Wakf ou Habous*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1896); G. Baer, “The Evolution of Private Landownership in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent,” in C. Issawi ed., *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800–1914* (Chicago, 1966).

⁷⁷ However, the protections of waqf were not absolute, as during fitnās or following disgrace notables could have their waqfs taken away from them. For one example of waqf properties taken from an individual during his exposure to the muṣādara see Yūnīnī, 2/392. See also Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 60–2. Again, this presents an intriguing contrast to Sung China, which also had a large number of religious charitable endowments. These, however, were usurped by the bureaucracy, which engaged in regular suppression of religious groups and the appropriation of their revenue sources: Gernet, *Chinese Civilization*, 301, 308.

⁷⁸ G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad,” *BSOAS* 24 (1961); Makdisi, “La corporation à l’époque classique de l’Islam,” in Bosworth et al. eds., *The Islamic World*, 196.

Emphasizing the legal status of madrasas as private acts of charity, these scholars have stressed the pietistic motives of their founders and the socially desirable project of supporting higher education.⁷⁹

These later scholars have rendered an important service in demonstrating that madrasas were not founded as acts of state but rather as “private” waqfs. However, by correcting (or over-correcting) earlier views, they have bypassed several large issues. It is true that there is no evidence that madrasas were ever intended to advance an ideological program or train state cadres. It is also undeniable that in terms of Islamic law madrasas were pious foundations – which could be established only by individuals. However, waqfs often had political and social uses irrespective of their legal status. In overemphasizing the legal status of madrasas as charitable foundations, these scholars have stripped them of many of their social, ideological, and political uses.

The debate over whether madrasas were established out of private religious motives or whether they were state institutions has generally failed to take into account the peculiarities of high medieval Middle Eastern politics. The division between “private” and “public” acts on the part of powerful people distorts how the military elite dominated the city. As we have seen, ruling groups in medieval Damascus did not administer the city by contracting with autonomous civilian or religious entities; neither did they have a socially intrusive apparatus of state. Rather, rulers supported the elites upon whom they depended indirectly. With waqf as with iqṭā', warrior households gave the men upon whom they depended temporary control over revenue sources. In neither case did the recipient of the revenue source acquire ownership in the later European sense – the right to abuse a thing or to alienate it.⁸⁰ By founding madrasas, powerful households could insert themselves into the cultural, political, and social life of the city, and turn existing practices and relationships to their own benefit. This was how charitable foundations became instruments of politics.

The political utility of madrasas also accounts for the preponderance of members of warrior and ruling households in madrasa foundations. From Nūr al-Dīn's arrival in the city in 549/1154 until 750/1350, the great majority of the madrasas in the city were founded by members of households of rulers or amīrs.⁸¹ The role women played in foundations reveals the extent to which

⁷⁹ For example, “the chief motive for founding a waqf was qurba, drawing near to God, the desire to perform good works and to leave a legacy of such good works pleasing in the eyes of God who would not fail to reward the giver”: G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981), 39. Makdisi has done the fundamental study of the madrasa as a waqf. See *The Rise of Colleges*, 35–74, and Makdisi, “The Madrasa as a Charitable Trust and the University as a Corporation in the Middle Ages,” in *Correspondance d'Orient* 2 (Actes du V^e Congrès International d'Arabisants et d'Islamisants, Brussels, 1970); See also Amin, *al-Awqāf*, for the best documented and thoughtful study of waqf to date.

⁸⁰ For the definition of ownership in Europe see Critchley, *Feudalism*, 16–17.

⁸¹ Between 549/1154–5 and 620/1223–4 almost all madrasas and dār al-hadiths were founded by members of households of rulers and amīrs. Of the twenty-nine madrasas and dār al-hadiths founded in that period listed by Nu'aymī, twelve were established by rulers, four by wives of

it was the household, and not amīrs or rulers themselves, who founded waqfs on a large scale. It also gives us a rare glimpse into the complexity of relations within households. Between 554/1159–60 and 620/1223–4, according to Nu‘aymī, five of the major foundations were established by women from military households, all but one from the ruler’s household, and from 620 to 658/1259–60 another five foundations were founded by women from within ruling households or the households of important amīrs. The reasons given for these foundations are varied, but all show that these women acted as powerful members of warrior households.⁸² If it is true that foundations were not acts of state, neither were their founders concerned with “private” religious merit. Rather, the foundation of madrasas is perhaps best seen as an example of the

rulers, and five by their intimates, dependants, servants, and retainers. Outside the ruling household, six were established by amīrs and their households. At least one of these, the Qaymāziyya, was established by an amīr so close to the ruling household that he might well be considered a member of it: Nu‘aymī, 1/572–4. The period between the arrival of Nūr al-Dīn in 554/1159 and the Mongol conquest of the city in 658/1260 had two distinct divisions. Between the arrival of Nūr al-Dīn and the year 620, only three madrasas or dār al-hadīths were founded by civilians outside the ruling establishment, and it is possible that in fact none of these was entirely a civilian foundation. Some sources hold that the ‘Aṣrūniyya was founded by Nūr al-Dīn, and others by the wealthy scholar Ibn Abī ‘Aṣrūn. The attribution of the madrasa to Nūr al-Dīn seems likely. Because the madrasa was named after its first lecturer, and because his progeny continued to control the position, it is possible that the memory of Nūr al-Dīn’s foundation of the madrasa was forgotten: Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 17/572; Ibn Shaddād, 2/238; Nu‘aymī, 1/398–406. The second, al-‘Umarīyya, was originally founded in 554 by the Banū Qudāma, immigrants from Palestine who had fled the crusaders. This madrasa became the core of the Ḥanbali neighborhood of al-Ṣalihīyya. But the sources agree it was founded as a zāwiya for holy men, not as a madrasa, which it became only later; in any case, it relied on the patronage of amīrs and rulers to be completed: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 69–71; Ibn Kathīr, 13/38–9, 58, 59; D. Sack, *Damaskus. Entwicklung und Struktur einer Orientalisch-Islamischen Stadt* (Mainz, 1989), 82–3; Ibn Shaddād, 2/259; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā’id al-jawhariyya fi tārīkh al-Ṣalihīyya* (Damascus, 1980), 1/4, 5; Nu‘aymī, 2/100; Ibn Kathīr, 13/58, 59. The third was the dār al-hadīth al-Faqīliyya, founded by an Egyptian secretary long in the employ of Syrian rulers, who might plausibly be considered a member of the ruling household: Nu‘aymī, 1/90–2. With the possible exception of these three foundations, then, all major foundations were creations of military households. Beginning around 620, the foundation of madrasas changed in two respects. First, the pace of foundation quickened. From 620 to the Mongol invasion of 658, forty-one major madrasas and dār al-hadīths were founded, of which sixteen were founded in the six years 623–8. Second, it was only after 620 that civilians without any recorded association to the ruling household began to found madrasas in appreciable numbers: between 620 and 658 civilians established at least eleven madrasas and dār al-hadīths. Following an eighteen-year hiatus after the Mongol invasion of 658, these trends picked up at a reduced rate. Between 676/1277–8 and 750, of those madrasas whose founders are known, three were founded by amīrs, one by a daughter of the Ayyūbid al-‘Ādil, and four by civilians.

⁸² A powerful woman within the ruling Ayyūbid household, Rabī‘a Khātūn (d. 643/1245–6), a sister of Saladin and al-Malik al-‘Ādil, founded a Ḥanbali madrasa, although she herself was almost certainly Shāfi‘ī, as were all the Ayyūbids but one. The reason was that she was prevailed upon by a Ḥanbali woman scholar, al-Shaykha al-‘Ālima Umma al-Laṭīf Bint al-Nāsiḥ al-Ḥanbali. After Rabī‘a’s death, Umma al-Laṭīf was exposed to the muṣādara almost immediately: Nu‘aymī, 2/80; Ibn Kathīr, 13/171, 128, 146, 333; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā’id al-jawhariyya*, 1/158, 163; Ibn Shaddād, 2/257; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/756. Sitt al-Šām, for another example, deeded her house as a madrasa at the instigation of the chief qādī. Her nephew al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam was angry that the qādī took her oath without his permission, and had him beaten and publicly humiliated: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 117–18. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 161–7 for a different interpretation of the roles of women in the foundation of waqfs.

diffuse and irregular manner in which military households inserted themselves into the social life of the city.

Waqf and the warrior household

There were several social and political uses to which waqfs could be put. Beginning with Nūr al-Dīn, all rulers of Damascus faced the dilemma of rulers of external origin: they had simultaneously to co-opt part of the local elite and to bring in new men as alternatives to them. By founding madrasas, and by controlling mansabs in them, rulers and amīrs could do both. Founders of madrasas brought in new men whose fortunes were tied to the success of their households, men whose religious prestige protected them somewhat from the resentment of the existing civilian elites.⁸³ Some scholars were lured to the city and given stipends because they were from important centers of military recruitment. This was especially true of the Kurdish scholars enticed to the city during the Ayyūbid period, when Kurds comprised an important portion of the army.⁸⁴

A second reason that amīrs and others founded madrasas was to hold on to part of their property for their lifetimes, and to pass on a portion of it to their descendants. Amīrs, mamlūks, and wealthy civilians had a weak and temporary hold on property. In the event of death, disgrace, or temporary weakness, their fortunes were often confiscated.⁸⁵ To hold on to some of their property, and to pass it on to their intimates, they often deeded it as a waqf.⁸⁶ One immediate and personal advantage in deeding their houses as madrasas was that they could continue to live in them until their deaths.⁸⁷ Even a governor of

⁸³ J. Gilbert, "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and the Professionalization of the 'Ulamā' in Medieval Damascus," *SI* 52 (1980), 105–35; Gilbert, "The 'Ulama'"; Humphreys, "Politics and Architectural Patronage," 166–7.

⁸⁴ Humphreys, "Politics and Architectural Patronage," 166; Gilbert, "The 'Ulama,'" 40–2. Gilbert estimated that half of the resident 'ulamā' in the city during the period she covered were originally outsiders, and one-fifth to one-quarter were transients.

⁸⁵ This was true even of very high-ranking amīrs: the amīr Qaymāz, who had been the *ustādh* of Saladin, saw his property confiscated after the death of his patron: Ibn Kathīr, 13/23. See Amīn, *al-Awqaf*, 69–130 for the political uses of waqf in Cairo by amīrs and sultāns.

⁸⁶ The social and political uses of waqf have been studied more thoroughly for Egypt than for Syria. The fundamental study of the social uses of waqf is Amīn, *al-Awqaf*; see also his *Catalogue des documents d'archives du Caire de 239/853 à 922/1516* (Cairo, 1981). Other studies include H. Cattan, "The Law of Waqf," in M. Khadduri and H.J. Leibesny eds., *Law in the Middle East* vol. I (Washington, 1955); W. Heffening, "Waqf," art. *EI*(1); Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 35–74; C. Petry, "A Paradox of Patronage," *MW* 73 (1983), 190–5.

⁸⁷ See for example, the foundation deed dated 623 of the madrasa al-Šarīmiyya, founded by Šarīm al-Dīn Uzbak, a freedman of al-Sitt al-Adhra'. His waqf was intended first for himself and then for the use of Shāfi'i students. The waqf inscription, reportedly inscribed on the threshold or on the dome, read: "basmala, hadha'l-makānū'l-mubārak ansha'a't-ṭawāshī'l-ajal Šarīm ad-Dīn Jawhar Ibn 'Abd Allah al-hurr 'atiq as-sitt al-kabira al-jalila 'Ismāt al-Dīn 'Adhra' Ibna Shāhanshāh rahimahā Allah ta'ālā; wahwa waqf mahram wa-habs mu'abbad 'alā't-ṭawāshī'l-musammā 'alāhu muddata ḥayātihi thumma min ba'dihī 'alā'l-mutafaqqiha min aṣḥābi'l-imāmīsh-Shāfi'i raḍiyya Allahu 'anhu w'an-naṣru fi hadha'l-makān w'al-waqf 'alayhi li't-ṭawāshī jawhar al-musammā 'alāhu muddata ḥayātihi 'alā mā dawwana fi kitābi'l-waqf": Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 11, 171; Ibn Kathīr, 13/156; Nu'aymī, 1/326.

the city made use of waqt in this way. In 700/1300–1 the governor, released from imprisonment after his dismissal, donned a scholar's turban and took up residence in "his madrasa," in which he was eventually buried.⁸⁸ Founding a madrasa was also a means of turning wealth seized in political competition into a long-term political or personal asset. This was the case of the Shāfi'i madrasa al-Bādhara'iyya, which was constructed from a house seized from an amīr in fitna.⁸⁹

A third reason was to provide for their own tombs, which occasionally became household tombs, in which their intimates and dependants were buried. Scholars have long noted that if looked at from a purely formal or functional point of view, Syrian madrasas were tombs at least as much as they were anything else.⁹⁰ Damascenes, like many other medieval Middle Eastern peoples, felt a strong connection to the dead, and tombs – together with dreams, visions, and objects – had a vital role in linking the living and the dead. Finding suitable tombs in their lifetimes was one of the principal preoccupations of the city's amīrs and a'yān, and those with the means tried not to die without one.⁹¹ The preeminent families of the city also established their own family or individual tombs as waqfs.⁹²

Amīral households seem to have established madrasas as tombs out of a mix of status and religious concerns. A ruler or amīr or one of their intimates, buried in a madrasa-tomb, was assured of having attendants in the form of Qur'ān-reciters, often on one of the prime pieces of real estate in the city, the tomb chamber window overlooking a main street.⁹³ Powerful men and

⁸⁸ Dhahabi, *Kitāb al-ibar fī khabar man 'abar*, Köprülü Kütüphanesi MS 1052, fol. 340.

⁸⁹ Ibn Kathir, 13/63. For the use of the waqt on a very large scale to turn wealth seized into political and household assets, see Saladin's seizure in Cairo of the wealth (including the palace) of the Fātimid caliph, the treasury, and the amīrs and wazirs of the city, all of which he immobilized as waqt: Amin, *al-Awqāf*, 66–8.

⁹⁰ See R. Hillenbrand, "Madrasa," *EI* (2), 1139–40 for the inclusion of a mausoleum as the distinguishing feature of Syrian madrasas: "If . . . analyzed from the purely formal point of view, with no backward glance at their eastern origins, the obvious conclusion would be that a major, if not indeed the primary, purpose of the institution was to contain a monumental mausoleum." See also J. Sauvaget, "L'architecture musulmane en Syrie," in *RAA* 8 (1934), 36; D. Sourdel, "Réflexions sur la diffusion de la madrasa en orient du xie au xiiiie siècle," *REI* 44 (1976), 165–84.

⁹¹ See for example Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn 'Asākir, who while dying of cholera exerted himself to acquire a tomb: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 39. Another shaykh while dying gave instructions for his tomb to be built: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 10/270. A tomb was important for any man with distinction: the ruler of Mardin was broken by al-Ashraf when visiting Damascus, and his host built a tomb for him that cost 1,000 dirhams: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 134. For an amīr buried in his ustādh's (al-Malik al-Nāṣir) tomb in 664/1264–5 see Ibn Kathir, 13/248; Nu'aymī 1/122.

⁹² See Nu'aymī 2/223–301 for a list and description of such family tombs. For an example of a shaykh who was buried in a madrasa he founded next door to his house see Jazārī, BN MS, 328. See also K. Moaz, "Le Mausolée d'Ibn al-Muqaddam," in *MIFD* (1929); A.R. Moaz, "Note sur le mausolée de Saladin à Damas: son fondateur et les circonstances de sa fondation," *BEO* 39–40 (1987–8).

⁹³ J. Sauvaget, *Les Monuments Historiques de Damas* (Beirut, 1932); Sauvaget, "L'architecture musulmane en Syrie"; Sauvaget, "Notes sur quelques monuments musulmans de Syrie: à propos d'une étude récente," *Syria*, 24–5 (1944–8); Sauvaget, "Le cénotaphe de Saladin," *RAA* (1930), 168–75; Sauvaget and Ecochard, *Les Monuments Ayyoubides*; D. Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture," *Ars Islamica* 9–14 (1942–8); Hillenbrand, "Madrasa"; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 132; Ibn Khallikān, 4/170.

women could also be more certain of permanent burial in their houses if they immobilized them as waqfs. By founding waqfs they could also look after their spiritual interests in the afterlife. As the establishment of a madrasa protected the security and prestige of amīral households in life, it could do so after death.

Madrasa-tombs had political as well as personal uses for powerful men, their households, and their supporters. Symbolic politics were played out through honoring and desecrating the power of tombs.⁹⁴ Ceremonies held at tombs also allowed the intimates and clients of the household of a powerful man – and such groupings were the basis of power in the city – to maintain their coherence as a group. On such occasions they recited the entire Qur'ān – a *khatma* – at a tomb at specific times following the death of a powerful man. The Ayyūbids, for example, used the madrasa-tomb of Saladin for their Friday prayer.⁹⁵ These events and others like it allowed a group held together by ties to a single individual to renew its bonds after his death, as his relatives, associates, clients, and intimates met to honor the individual who had been at the center of their political and social relationships.⁹⁶ Households and those attached to them – especially their military supporters – had an interest in ensuring that their patrons occupied an imposing tomb, as they hoped that some of the patron's power would survive his demise. One illustration of this was the large tomb that Qaymāz built for al-Malik al-Mas'ūd in Cairo, after the latter had specifically ordered that he be buried in a simple grave in Mecca.⁹⁷ Tombs were not just for the dead, any more than patriarchal households were just for patriarchs.

Finally, amīral households established madrasas as a means of inserting themselves into the ritual and ceremonial geography of the city. Inaugural lectures, foundations, and ceremonies held in madrasas were major events. Such occasions were particularly important to amīral and ruling households, who had no charismatic qualification for their leadership, and were dependent on civilians for their legitimization. The establishment of foundations supported by waqfs was also a marker of status for the most powerful amīrs, and is in some respects comparable to the eugertism of notables in Antiquity.⁹⁸

Although madrasas had all of these uses, they were generally not conceived as ideological projects, built to impress the population of the city with the power of ruling groups. The design of the madrasas was rarely monumental or purpose built.⁹⁹ After Nūr al-Dīn, who was the only ruler of the city to

⁹⁴ For confiscation of the power of a tomb, see the case of the tomb of the hero of 'Ayn Jālūt, Kutuz, which became an object of pilgrimage. Baybars, responsible for his death, had the tomb sealed: Ibn Kathīr, 13/225–6. For the desecration of a tomb see Ibn Kathīr, 13/163, 269.

⁹⁵ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 151; Ibn Kathīr, 13/121; Nu'aymi, 1/580.

⁹⁶ See for example a *khatma* held in 732/1331–2: Jazarī, Köp. MS, 296.

⁹⁷ Ibn Khallikān, 4/177.

⁹⁸ See Amīn, *al-Awqāf*, 94–5 for a sensitive interpretation of an especially revealing quotation from Ibn Taghribirdī that would seem to apply to amīrs in Damascus as well. For eugertism in Antiquity see Veyne, *Bread and Circuses*, esp. 5–59.

⁹⁹ See Hillenbrand, "Madrasas," 1140, for the "loose boundaries" among building types. Even though some madrasas had numbers of rooms for students, the provision of rooms for

integrate a street plan with monumental buildings, few if any madrasas formed part of a larger project.¹⁰⁰ Most were built by owners of existing buildings or by others who acquired existing structures. In either case founders added a domed hall for a tomb in the main room and often a residence for the lecturer.¹⁰¹ Many major buildings, including the dār al-hadīth al-Ashrafiyya, the tomb of Saladin, and the Zāhirīyya, were reworked houses. The surviving buildings show additions and decorations typical of religious buildings used for prayer, including muqarnas and mihrābs. It is difficult to discern an imperial building program, even in household foundations constructed from original plans.¹⁰² These buildings were not integrated with any street plan, and most were quite small. Thus, although madrasas were founded by members of military households, they did not represent an imperial building program. They were rather a household urbanism of small inserts into the existing geography of the city.

Other uses of household endowments

Amīrs and rulers made use of madrasas and dār al-hadīths for purposes that had little to do with education. Warriors and rulers supported the civilians they depended on partly by paying them directly with stipends (*jāmikiyya*) and partly by giving them manṣabs in madrasas.¹⁰³ Many of the important

students was an incidental rather than necessary aspect of madrasa foundation: see *ibid.* and D. Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture," 44–5. Some madrasas may have had a distinctive architecture intended to convey some message or image of power. The design of some madrasas was Iranian or Iraqi: see N. Elisséeff, "Dimashk," *EI* (2), 283; D. Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture," 16. The Ribāṭ al-Nāṣiri, founded by al-Malik al-Nāṣir, was said to be "one of the strangest buildings ever built," but there is no evidence that it was intended to convey an idea of power: Nu‘aymī, 1/117. The Nūriyya dār al-hadīth was also noted for its difference from local buildings, but this may have been the result of a mismatch between a plan by an ‘Irāqī architect and local building materials: Sauvaget and Ecochard, *Les Monuments Ayyoubides*, 24, 25.

¹⁰⁰ On the urbanism of Nūr al-Dīn see: Elisséeff, "Les Monuments de Nur al-Din"; D. Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture"; Sauvaget, *Les Monuments Historiques*; Sauvaget, "Notes," *Syria*, 24 (1944–5), 21, 219; Sauvaget and Ecochard, *Les Monuments Ayyoubides*, vol. II, 88; Y. al-Tabba, "The Architectural Patronage of Nūr al-Dīn (1146–1174)." On Ayyubid and Mamlūk madrasa architecture see Humphreys, "Mamlūk Architecture," 109–10.

¹⁰¹ For examples of madrasas established from existing buildings see Nu‘aymī, 1/55, 80, 97, 98, 114, 159, 169–73, 236, 237, 265, 274, 301–2, 368–9, 374, 431, 474, 518, 519, 530–2, 541–2, 555–6, 569–71, 573; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 33, 59, 81, 86, 117–18, 119, 136–7, 148, 149, 169, 177; Abū Shāma, *al-Rawdatayn*, 2/231, 239; Ibn Shākir, *Vat. Ar. MS*, 106, 134; Ibn Shākir, 21/134–9; Ibn Kathīr, 13/22, 23, 34, 46, 78, 84, 135, 181, 221; Ibn Shaddād, 2/207, 215, 227, 233, 236, 239, 241, 243, 262; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’at*, 8/442, 642; Ibn Wāsil, 3/60, 63; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qalā’id al-jawhariyya*, 1/131; Yūnīnī, 3/247–8. Medical madrasas were also established from existing houses: Ibn Kathīr, 13/130; Ibn Shākir, *Vat. Ar. MS*, 101. For examples of the construction of the tomb-chamber and the residence for the lecturer see Nu‘aymī, 1/374; Yūnīnī, 3/236; Dhahabī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Jazārī*, Kōp. MS, 26.

¹⁰² See Ibn Kathīr, 13/23; Nu‘aymī, 1/573 on the dār al-hadīth, and Ibn Kathīr, 13/3 on the tomb of Saladin. On the Zāhirīyya see Yūnīnī, 3/236; G. Leiser, "The Endowment of the al-Zāhirīyya in Damascus," *JESHO* 27 (1983), 33–55.

¹⁰³ For the use of the term *jāmikiyya* for a stipend for a qādi see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 236.

mansabs were supported in part with income from madrasas. Madrasas supported the preacher of the Umayyad Mosque, and a group of madrasas known as the “qādīs’ madrasas” supported the chief judges in the later Mamlūk period.¹⁰⁴ The sources occasionally called the madrasas that supported clients of powerful people “worldly mansabs” (*manāṣib dunyāwiyya*).¹⁰⁵

Moreover, as ruling groups relied on the a'yān for services that rulers elsewhere obtained from bureaucracies and autonomous corporate or religious bodies, madrasas had many uses that we associate with such institutions and groups. They were residences for the chief qādīs, and seats from which they delivered judgment.¹⁰⁶ Notaries also sat in front of madrasas.¹⁰⁷ Sultāns and amīrs also made use of madrasas for specific tasks. Madrasas were residences for amīrs, collecting points for booty, and housing for ransomed prisoners.¹⁰⁸ Amīrs and governors also jailed civilians in madrasas.¹⁰⁹ In response to Mongol threats to the city, madrasas became storehouses for arms and centers for the training of civilians in military skills.¹¹⁰ When an emissary from the Mongol conqueror Ghazān met with the a'yān of the city, it was in a madrasa.¹¹¹

Such were the benefits that household waqfs such as madrasas and dār al-ḥadīths provided to ruling elites. In a city in which ruling households were socially distant yet physically close to the groups they exploited, charitable foundations gave them the services we find in formal entities and practices elsewhere. Rulers, amīrs, and members of their households were politically and socially aloof. The diwāns lacked the intrusive purpose, the knowledge, and the specialized agencies to administer the city. Moreover, there were few if any corporate groups with which warrior households could contract to pursue their own objectives. Instead, such households administered the city, advanced a claim to domination, and looked after their own interests through

¹⁰⁴ These included the two Shāmiyyas and the Zāhiriyā al-Juwāniyya: “wa ja‘ala sh-shaykh shams al-dīn al-barmāwī nā‘ibahu fī'l-khiṭābā w'al-madāris al-muta'allqa bihi [sic] ghayr madāris al-quḍā” [or possibly al-qādā] wa-hya‘ sh-shāmiyyatayn w'az-zāhiriyā l-juwāniyya”: Nu‘aymī, 1/289.

¹⁰⁵ These included especially the mansab of the lecturer of the Ḥadīyya, Ghazāliyya, and Atābakiyya, and the mansab of shaykh ash-shuyūkh: Ibn Kathīr, 14/106–7.

¹⁰⁶ The Shāfi‘ī chief qādī held the tadrīs of the Ḥadīyya, which was also his residence: Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 421, 594; BN MS, 302, 334; Ibn Kathīr, 13/14; 14/111, 148, 165; Yūnīnī, 3/64, 65; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 646. The Ḥanbalī chief qādī resided and gave judgment at the Jawziyya: Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 225, 255; Ibn Kathīr, 14/76. The Ḥanafī qādī used the Nūriyya al-Ḥanafīyya: Ibn Kathīr, 14/42, 76. Another madrasa used as a seat and residence by chief qādī was the Mujahidiyya: Ibn Kathīr, 13/69. The Shāfi‘ī deputy (*nā‘ib*) qādī also gave judgment at the Ḥadīyya: Ibn Kathīr, 14/144. ¹⁰⁷ Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 429.

¹⁰⁸ For two amīrs who resided in the Ashrafiyya see Jazārī, BN MS, 348. For madrasas used as collecting points for booty see Ibn Kathīr, 14/7. The Ḥadīyya al-Kubrā housed ransomed prisoners when they arrived with Frankish merchants in 727: Ibn Kathīr, 14/129.

¹⁰⁹ For one example see Jazārī, BN MS, 237–9.

¹¹⁰ In the face of the Mongol threat of 680/1281 the sultān ordered each mosque and madrasa to set up an archery range so civilians could practice: Ibn Kathīr, 13/281; Ibn Shākir, 21/281. In the aftermath of the siege of 699/1299–1300 civilians began to store weapons in the markets and turned the madrasas into workshops: Ibn Kathīr, 14/12.

¹¹¹ Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Munajjid* ed., 22.

the political use of legal devices such as waqf. The political use of waqfs on a large scale gave rulers and amīrs the mix of what we would call “private” and “public” benefits necessary to successful politics.

Exploitation of the *a'yān*

As warriors used indirect means of recruiting and supporting the civilian elite, they also used indirect means of exploiting them. Taxes condemned as contrary to Islam provided some revenues. However, one consequence of the absence of a politically and fiscally effective bureaucracy was that amīrs often had no effective means of raising revenue, especially in fitnas or wars against outsiders. Instead, they made widespread use of temporary taxes, monopolies, forced loans and purchases, and especially the *muṣādara* or “mulcting” as it is somewhat misleadingly translated.¹¹²

The *muṣādara* imprisoned and tortured individuals or their families to compel the surrender of their fortunes.¹¹³ It was historically an administrative device to appropriate the fortunes of office-holders after their dismissal, and throughout the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods this use of the *muṣādara* continued. The *muṣādara* was also used to confiscate the fortunes of men who died unexpectedly or who had no males in the family to protect their property, and in these instances the ruin of a house could be complete.¹¹⁴ In addition to these lasting uses of the *muṣādara*, it also became a political and revenue-raising instrument of warrior households. So many of the merchants mentioned in the chronicles and biographical dictionaries were subjected to it that it is clear that few large merchant fortunes survived in families for long.¹¹⁵

Amīrs and rulers regularly made use of the *muṣādara* on a large scale. Several such *muṣādaras* were established in madrasas. After the Mamlūk seizure of the city, an expropriation board (*diwān al-istikhlāṣ*) was set up in a madrasa.¹¹⁶ Another *muṣādara* was set up in 687/1288 in the tomb (*turba*) of

¹¹² For the forced sale and forced loan, see Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 56–9.

¹¹³ For a few examples among many that could be cited, see Ibn Kathīr, 13/290 for the mulcting of a lecturer after his dismissal during a fitna caused by a contest between the governor and the sultān; *ibid.*, 14/165, for the torture of one of the Banū al-Qalānī for 100,000 dirhams; Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 13/190 for another wealthy Banū al-Qalānī exposed to the *muṣādara* by the governor of the city; *ibid.*, 6/39, for the torture of a merchant for 500,000 dirhams; Jazārī, Köp. MS, 450, for the torture of two qādīs, including a chief qādī.

¹¹⁴ See for example the fate of the family of a chief qādī who died without sons in 738/1337–8. The governor expelled his family and sealed his house. His money was confiscated from his sons-in-law, his daughters, and his wife; and his clothes, books, and riding animals were sold: Jazārī, Köp. MS, 602. When in 713/1313–14 a wazīr died without sons, his wives were married off, his houses occupied, and his money confiscated: Ibn Kathīr, 14/109. For the similar fate of an amīr who died without sons see Jazārī, BN MS, 559–60. See also Ibn Kathīr, 13/146 and Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 18/220 for examples of merchants whose fortunes were confiscated after their untimely deaths.

¹¹⁵ For two typical examples of the hundreds that could be cited see Ibn al-Ṣuqāṭī, 7; Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 66a.

¹¹⁶ The Qaymāriyya was the seat of the *diwān al-istikhlāṣ*: Ibn Kathīr, 14/7. The *muṣādara* of 695/1295–6 was established in the 'Azīziyya: Jazārī, BN MS, 349–50.

Umm Ṣāliḥ, one of the larger madrasas of the city. This muṣādara was conducted by an amīr and an ʻālim who came to Damascus from Egypt with the specific aim of mulcting the wealthy a'yān.¹¹⁷ Another instance was the visit of the sultān to Cairo in 695/1295–6, in which he demanded and received 80,000 dirhams from a'yān and amīrs alike. The sultān also set up a board at the ʻAzīziyya madrasa in Damascus at which the entire yearly income (jāmikiyya) of the secretaries of the diwāns was taken.¹¹⁸

The muṣādara on a wide scale could also be used as a political tool in fitna. When a powerful individual fell from favor, his supporters could be exposed to the muṣādara en masse, as was the case with the supporters of al-Ṣāliḥ ʻIsmāʻīl.¹¹⁹ Collective exactions were also used by conquerors to exploit the wealth of the city, and to extract money from old elites to give it to new men. One example was the Mongol seizure of the city in 699/1299–1300, during which the a'yān of the city were said to have lost 3,600,000 dirhams, in addition to what secretaries and amīrs lost.¹²⁰

Thus, Ayyūbid and Mamlūk warrior households brought few new political or administrative practices to Damascus. They never imposed permanent, hierarchical, and impersonal institutions on the city to administer it. Instead, through a kind of maladroit patrimonialism they made political use of existing social, cultural, and administrative practices. The state in this period was not an impersonal entity, possessing specialized agencies, capable of formulating long-term strategies to pursue political goals. The politics of the city consisted of continuously renegotiated relationships among the ruling household, the important amīrs and their households, and civilian elites with specialized knowledge or religious prestige. If we are to speak of the state at all, it is as an abstraction of the personal ties of alliance, dependence, and dominance among these three groups. Rather than look for the mechanisms by which the state, as the primary embodiment and agent of power, diffused power from the top down, we need to understand a more complex situation. Studies of the bureaucracy, of such entities as the sultanate and the caliphate, of the legal and “public” aspects of power, are undeniably useful in themselves. These, however, do not cover the entirety, or even perhaps the most important part, of relations among power, cultural practices, and the social strategies of groups. Such approaches have been useful in medieval Islamic history only with so much qualification that they lose the very precision they are intended to introduce.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Kathīr, 13/311.

¹¹⁸ Jazārī, BN MS, 349–50. For other examples see the contender in a fitna who in 740/1242–3 demanded 1,000,000 dirhams from the merchants of the city: Ibn Kathīr, 14/195; in 636/1238–9 al-Jawād subjected Damascenes to the muṣādara until they came up with 600,000 dinars: *ibid.*, 13/152. See also *ibid.*, 14/79. ¹¹⁹ Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/525.

¹²⁰ This sum is especially high in light of the fact that most of the a'yān had already decamped in the exodus or *jāfī* to Cairo. Much of this money was redistributed to men the Mongols sponsored. The son of the preeminent Mongol intellectual, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūṣī, received 100,000 dirhams from one such redistribution, and the ṣūfī chief shaykh received 600,000: Ibn Kathīr, 14/8, 9.

The a^cyān and the new order

As Ayyūbids and Mamlūks learned to make use of existing practices for their own benefit, the a^cyān of the city accommodated themselves to the military patronage state. In the long run, the recruitment and conditions of social reproduction of the a^cyān were transformed, and the city's defanged pre-Nūrid a^cyān recast themselves as a cultural elite that competed for mansābs. In the short term, however, what is striking about the culture and social practices of the a^cyān is not a break with the pre-Nūrid past, but rather continuity with it. The a^cyān did not accommodate themselves to the military patronage state by any radical transformation of their social and cultural practices, but by making different uses of existing ones.

In the fifty years before the arrival of Nūr al-Dīn, the a^cyān of the city disputed control of the city with imperial governors and garrisons. The a^cyān defended their status through their control of city offices and their influence with associations of young men (ahdāth and similar groups) that wielded violence in several forms.¹²¹ A^cyān families survived partly because they could use young men's organized violence to protect property. While never formally autonomous, the city's a^cyān disputed control of the city, often successfully, with Fāṭimid and Saljūkid governors and garrisons.¹²² In this period they fit loosely (but still not well) Weber's definition of urban notables as a group that controls property and participates in politics autonomously.

With the new military patronage state, the a^cyān's hold on property, its control over offices, and its command of organized violence all weakened. Beginning with Nūr al-Dīn, the a^cyān lost control of the ahḍāth. The a^cyān did not lose their military roles entirely, and some continued to participate in military campaigns. However, they were restricted to fighting external enemies, and were largely prohibited from taking part in the political struggles of the amīrs.¹²³ They never used military training or arms to defend themselves against amīrs. A few wealthy civilians established waqfs to protect property and pass on a portion of it to their descendants. One of the few merchants to establish a madrasa was a man named Ibn Rawāḥa. In spite of his interests all over Syria and a substantial fortune, he thought it prudent to deed his house as a madrasa and to reside in it until his death.¹²⁴

¹²¹ C. Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie Musulmane du moyen âge," *Arabica* 5 (1958), 225–50; 6 (1959), 25–56, 233–65; Cahen, "Ahḍāth," *EI* (2); E. Ashtor, "L'administration urbaine en Syrie médiévale," *RSO* 31 (1956), 73–128; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 154.

¹²² See Ashtor, "L'administration urbaine," 118–22, and *A Social and Economic History*, 225–31 for an account of the struggles between "urban militias" and governors, which unfortunately suffers from uncritical use of terms such as "feudal" and "bourgeois."

¹²³ For one extreme example of a lecturer who took part in Baybar's campaigns as a horse-archer see Jazārī, BN MS, 8.

¹²⁴ Dhahabi, *Mukhtaṣar al-Jazārī*, Köp. MS, 26; Ibn Kathir, 13/116; Nuṣaymī, 1/265, 266, 274; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 136–7, 149, 187, 189.

The descendants of a^cyān founders could control the waqf as its administrators, and in a few cases they held the lecturer's manṣab at the madrasa.¹²⁵ But the protections of large-scale waqfs were less available to the a^cyān than to amīrs.

Moreover, Nūr al-Dīn and his successors, by establishing a fairly large number of manṣabs in religious institutions, and by making appointments to existing or new offices, brought in their own new men while they recruited established households.¹²⁶ As the great a^cyān households lost control over property and instruments of violence as vehicles of social reproduction, more and more they looked to manṣabs as a means of maintaining their status and social power. Some notable families, including the hitherto preeminent Banū al-Šūfī, lost their standing in the city.¹²⁷ Others benefited from the new order by accommodating themselves to patronage as practiced by Nūr al-Dīn and his successors. They now made use of their learning to compete for the "monetized honors" of the manṣabs, not to acquire the cultural distinction of a notability.¹²⁸ These were no longer (if in fact they ever were) "urban notables" in the Weberian sense; rather they were a cultural elite that maintained its social standing through competing for social prizes in the gift of others.

Some of the old families, together with descendants of scholars patronized by Nūr al-Dīn and Saladin, took advantage of the new opportunities provided by the military patronage state. Competing successfully for manṣabs over generations, the longevity of some of these families is striking.¹²⁹ The Banū al-Zakī had seven chief qādīs between the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century and the end of the seventh/thirteenth.¹³⁰ They claimed descent from the Umayyads, were tied by blood and marriage to other a^cyān households, and had a large family tomb in which they interred themselves and their clients – including Ibn 'Arabī. Many of this lineage had manṣabs in religious founda-

¹²⁵ See for examples Yūnīnī, 2/10, 337; Nu^caymī, 1/398–406.

¹²⁶ Gilbert, "The 'Ulama'"; Gilbert, "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship." Secretaries in Syria were also of mixed origins under Saladin: Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 26. This process continued throughout the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods, as new rulers introduced into the city scholars beholden to them, for example, Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/341.

¹²⁷ Cahen, "Mouvements populaires," vol. I, 239; Ibn al-Qalānī, 314–25; Ashtor, "L'administration urbaine," 122–6.

¹²⁸ On the concept of the monetized honor see Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 33, 294, 304, 321, 379; Wink, *al-Hind*, vol. I, p. 13.

¹²⁹ Several of these families have been studied. See W.M. Brinner, "The Banū Sasrā: a Study on the Transmission of a Scholarly Tradition," *Arabica* 7 (May, 1960), 167–95; F. Wüstenfeld, "Stammtafel der Familie Banū Asākir," *Orientalia* (Amsterdam, 1846); L. Pouzet, "La descendance de l'historien 'Ali Ibn 'Asākir et ses alliances à Damas au viie/XIIIe siècle," in *Mélanges M. Allard et Nwyia* (1984), 515–29; K.S. Salibi, "The Banū Jamā'a: A Dynasty of Shāfi'i Jurists in the Mamlūk Period," *SI* 9 (1958); Salibi, "Ibn Jamā'a," *EI* (2). Gilbert covered the major a^cyān lineages in "The 'Ulama'," 154–86. The most detailed and sensitive study of a Syrian elite lineage is A.-M. Eddé, "Une Grande Famille de Shāfiites Alépins. Les Banū l-'Agamī aux XIIe–XIIIe siècles," *REMM* 62 (1991), 61–71.

¹³⁰ L. Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe/XIIIe siècle. Vie et structures religieuses d'une métropole islamique* (Beirut, 1988), 121.

tions.¹³¹ The Banū Sanī al-Dawla and the Banū al-Qalānī also served Saljukids, Zangids, Ayyūbids, Mongols, and Mamlūks, and had waqfs in their lines of descent.¹³² The Banū Abī Ḥaṣrūn held manṣabs in the city for 200 years, beginning before Nūr al-Dīn's reign. They were related by marriage to Saladin, and held the manṣab of the Ḥaṣrūniyya, a madrasa which served as the tomb of the lineage's founder, for three generations.¹³³ The Banū Ḥasākir were related by both marriage and student-teacher ties to the Banū al-Zākī, the Banū al-Sulāmī, and a number of scholars newly arrived in the city. They also controlled many city offices.¹³⁴ These families, and a number of others, were the *buyūtāt*, the a^cyān lineages most successful at translating religious prestige into the social reproduction of status. They were known as "bayt al-ilm," "bayt al-hadīth," or by other honorifics referring to the transmission of *ilm* through lineages.¹³⁵ Characteristic of all was their use of religious prestige, political connections, and social distinction to protect wealth, to struggle for manṣabs, and to a lesser extent to control waqfs.

Once the a^cyān aimed at manṣabs as a prime target of social competition, the recruitment of the elite opened up. Following Nūr al-Dīn and the proliferation of manṣabs in the city, established elites made room for immigrants and self-made men.¹³⁶ Wandering scholars, provincial elites, and immigrants fleeing Mongols and Crusaders joined scholars recruited by warrior households.¹³⁷ At the same time, a^cyān families joined international networks of scholars, and Damascenes often departed the city to take up positions or seek their fortunes elsewhere.¹³⁸ Brought together in study-circles, tied to one another through marriage and discipleship, these men of disparate origins coalesced into a new elite whose recruitment remained fluid.¹³⁹ The a^cyān did not form a closed

¹³¹ Ibn Kathīr, 13/32, 101, 156, 308; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 136–7.

¹³² On the Banū al-Qalānī see Ashtor, "L'administration urbaine," 106–7; on the waqfs of Ibn al-Qalānī (lahu min awqāf wālidihī mā yafkhi) see Ibn al-Ṣuqā'ī, 176. On the Banū Sanī al-Dawla and the waqfs in their line of descent from 520/1126–7 onwards, see Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 8/250; Yūnīnī, 2/10. They were also given the madrasa al-Qilījiyya by its founder: Nu'aymī, 1/569. ¹³³ See Ibn Shaddād, 2/238; Nu'aymī, 1/398–406; Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 17/572.

¹³⁴ Nu'aymī, 1/180–2; Ibn Kathīr, 13/101.

¹³⁵ See for a few examples of the hundreds that could be cited: Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 7/177, 18/134; Ṣafadī, *A^cyān*, 5b; Ibn Shākir, 21/29; Yūnīnī, 1/333; 2/354–5, 487; 3/39; Ibn Kathīr, 13/66, 264, 314.

¹³⁶ Gilbert estimated that approximately half of the senior 'ulamā' in the period up to 1260 were immigrants, and one-quarter to one-fifth were transients. "The 'Ulamā'," 40–2. The number of artisans who made their way into the ranks of the learned was not large, but it was still significant. See Ibn Abī Ḫaṣrūn, 670–1, for a carpenter and stone cutter who began studying Euclid to learn the "secrets" of carpentry, and then learned more of the Greek sciences until he became an engineer, mathematician, and physician, noted for his edition of Galen and for maintaining the water clock in the Umayyad Mosque. He had stipends for keeping the clock in running order and for his service in a hospital (*bimāristān*). He was also known for his books on medicines, on war and administration (*siyāsa*), and for his abridgement of Isbahānī's *al-Aghānī*.

¹³⁷ For one account of how an immigrant from Baghādād encountered others from his home city see Ibn Abī Ḫaṣrūn, 686. ¹³⁸ See Gilbert, "The 'Ulamā'," 6.

¹³⁹ See *ibid.*, 19, on marriage relations between scholars from outside the city and established elites.

group or caste, and throughout the period under consideration we cannot consider them anything like a monolithic “establishment.” In income, relations to rulers, and status, the a'yān covered a wide range; it was social trajectory more than origin or even position that defined most a'yān households.

Although the recruitment of the learned elite was relatively open, and the circulation of individuals if not of households was rapid, the a'yān constituted nonetheless a self-conscious group. The a'yān had their own characteristic cultural style, conviction of superiority, and tactics of exclusion. Many inhabited certain neighborhoods such as al-Šālihiyya or Darb al-Ājamī.¹⁴⁰ The learned also had a syndic called the *naqib al-muta'ammamīn* or the “syndic of those who wear the turban.” The functions of this syndic are unclear, but he may have checked the claims to learning of new arrivals on the model of the “syndic of the descendants of 'Ali Ibn Abī Tālib,” who verified the claims of newcomers to Tālibid descent.¹⁴¹ But what defined the new elite, and what advanced their strategies of social reproduction, was less money, land, title, certified competence, or office than the exemplary possession of 'ilm.

By acquiring 'ilm, the a'yān expected two things, and it was these common expectations – rather than income, land, or office – that defined them as a social category. First, through learning they made themselves eligible to compete for mansabs. The jurists never elaborated a concept of the “right” to a mansab, nor were mansabs acquired through any formal qualification comparable to the Sung examination. However, acquiring a mansab required *istihqāq*, a quality which combined notions of “suitability,” “adequacy,” and “eligibility.” The precise definition of *istihqāq* was debated by the sources, but the consensus seems to be that with respect to civilians it referred to the piety and learning appropriate to a recipient of waqf income.¹⁴² Both teachers and students were described as holding mansabs, and both were collectively known as “the eligible” (*al-mustaḥiqīn*).

Istihqāq was a quality expected of recipients of monetized honors. All recipients of waqf income in madrasas – including shaykhs and students – had to be seen as “eligible” to hold on to their mansabs, as did soldiers for their pay (jāmikiyya) and amīrs for their iqṭā'īs. One indication of the relationship of *istihqāq* to income was a review of the army held in 711/1310–11. The secretary of the army (*kātib al-jaysh*) according to Nuwayrī was expected to register

¹⁴⁰ On al-Šālihiyya see Ibn Tūlūn, *al-Qalā'id al-jawhariyya*; Sack, *Damaskus*, 82–3. On the residence of many among the learned in the Darb al-Ājamī, see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 95.

¹⁴¹ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 8/304. For a “*naqib al-tālibiyīn*” who died in 689/1290 see Jazārī, BN MS, 5a. Whatever these offices were, they were seldom cited in the sources, and rarely in the context of social and political competition.

¹⁴² Subkī, *Mu'īd*, 28. For suitability (*istihqāq* l'il-manāṣib), which referred to ability, correct belief, and morality, see Nu'aymī, 1/305; an example of “suitability” (*istihqāq*) in a document appointing a lecturer to a mansab: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/415. For the “moment of eligibility” (“*waqt al-istihqāq*”) as a stage a young person had to reach before obtaining a mansab see Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/253; for an appointment to a mansab described as “by *istihqāq*,” see Subkī, Staadtsbibliothek MS, 16; also chapter 2, note 110.

recipients of iqṭā'īs, cash, and measures of grain according to their various categories, in order to verify their istihqāq.¹⁴³ However, formal reviews of the military were fairly rare, in this one the army registry (*diwān al-jaysh*) proved itself incompetent: “They could not tell a good soldier from a bad one, nor a new arrival from one whose migration (*hijra*) to the gates of the sultān was early. They were incapable of recognizing the eligible (*mustāhiq*).” In the event a qādī able to “determine the mustāhiq from the interloper (*dakhil*)” took over the review.¹⁴⁴ Another indication of the universal nature of revenue sources was the opposite of istihqāq – ‘ajz, (also ‘ajaz) or “incapacity.” To a yān and warriors both, ‘ajz when demonstrated could cost a shaykh, amīr, student, or soldier his manṣāb, iqṭā'ī stipend, or soldier’s pay.¹⁴⁵

Second, the a'yān made use of their learning to acquire a form of social honor known as *hurma*.¹⁴⁶ *Hurma* was a quasi-sacred combination of honor and inviolability that referred to cities, women, and sacred objects as well as families and individuals.¹⁴⁷ Both civilians and warriors acquired *hurma*, though the *hurma* of civilians referred to learning and piety rather than the honor of the warrior.¹⁴⁸ Among civilians, *hurma* earned them both respect and a certain inviolability among rulers and the common people.¹⁴⁹ The a'yān

¹⁴³ Nuwayrī, 8/201. ¹⁴⁴ Ibn al-Dawādārī, 9/238–9.

¹⁴⁵ See the individual whose stipend was cut off by an amīr because of his “incapacity”; “qāṭa‘ a-khubzahu li‘annahu zahara ‘ajzahu” Safadī, A'yān, fol. 27b. Also Ibn al-Dawādārī, 9/244.

¹⁴⁶ *Hurma* was defined by Lane (*An Arabic–English Lexicon*) as “the state of being sacred, or inviolable; sacredness and inviolability; reverence, respect, honor.” Lane quoted one use of the term: “When a man has a relationship to us, and we regard him with bashfulness, we say, *lahu hurma*.”

¹⁴⁷ Yūnīnī, 2/400. Damascus was said to have *hurma* when it was under the leadership of a wise governor: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 150. For the preservation of the *hurma* of Aleppo when the city surrendered honorably during a siege see Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubda al-ḥalab fi tā’rīkh halab*, S. Dahān ed. (Damascus, 1968), 65. In a debate whether it was permissible for a Muslim to be cursed, one protagonist produced a ḥadīth (not in Wensinck): “The *hurma* of the Muslim is greater than the *hurma* of the *ka‘ba*,” Ibn Khallikān, 2/447. Sacred texts also had *hurma*. Paper makers were admonished not reuse paper with quotations from the Qur’ān, ḥadīth, or the names of prophets or angels on it, because it had *hurma*: Ibn al-Ḥājj, 4/89. *Hurma* could also be challenged. A shaykh was praised for never challenging anyone’s *hurma* (*lā’sqata li-ahad hurma*): Yūnīnī, 4/61. Although as far as this writer knows there have been no studies of *hurma* in the pre-modern Middle East, the association of *hurma* with the sexual honor of the family in some modern Middle Eastern societies is suggestive of other meanings that may have existed in our period: see D. Eickelman, *The Middle East: an Anthropological Approach*, 2nd edn. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1989), 204–5.

¹⁴⁸ For sultāns, amīrs, and members of ruling households who had *hurma*, see Ibn Shākir, 21/128; Ibn Kathīr, 13/321; Ibn Khallikān, 1/162–3; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/642; Yūnīnī, 3/230, 238. For the revolt of some of al-Nāṣir Qalāwūn’s mamlūks against him as a violation of his *hurma* (*kharaqū hurma as-sultān*) see Ibn Kathīr, 13/338. For the *hurma* of shaykhs see for example the story of the Qur’ān-reciter who lost his *hurma* because he drank wine with al-Malik al-Ashraf, and became a wanderer in shame: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 134; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/632. A shaykh could be apparently impious but still possess *hurma*: see for example the shaykh known for his unbelief, who held study sessions for Samaritans, Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and cultivated the Hellenistic sciences, who nonetheless was known for the widespread recognition of his *hurma*: Yūnīnī, 2/165.

¹⁴⁹ Some variation of “*lahu hurma wāfara ‘inda l-mulūk w’al-a'yān*” was very common in death-notices of shaykhs. See for examples Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 1/179, 18/397; Ibn Shākir, 21/120; Yūnīnī, 4/131.

also struggled to acquire ḥurma for use in competition over manṣabs. When Ibn Sā'id al-Dawla (d. 709/1309–10) was lobbying for the post of wazīr, he went to a holy man outside the city and won from his encounter a ḥurma greater than that of the sitting wazīr.¹⁵⁰ Among the military ḥurma was also associated with advancement, as in the case of the man who acquired ḥurma in the eyes of al-Malik al-Manṣūr, and was made an amīr and given large iqṭā'īs.¹⁵¹ ḥurma was also imagined as a quantity that could increase or decrease; once lessened, its holder's shame made his wealth more vulnerable to plunder.¹⁵²

Men generally did not acquire learning in order to gain professional knowledge or qualifications. The object of learning was the prestige of the cultivated personality, which produced ḥurma and istiḥqāq. The eligibility of warriors and the learned alike for monetized honors was represented in virtually identical language. This is the first of many points of comparison between amīrs and a'yān. These two groups made use of similar cultural practices for similar social and political ends. In spite of the diversified nature of elites – composed of warriors and shaykhs from often distant origins – they also maneuvered within a similar environment. Most faced a central set of core problems of survival and success.

Household survival in the Latin West, the Middle East, and Sung China

To situate the distinctiveness of the arena of social and political competition in Damascus within the wider context of Eurasia in the period, it will be useful to compare elite strategies of survival in several areas of the continent. Urban elites in the Latin West had two broad strategies of social reproduction. First, families in cities of the Latin West occasionally adopted the titles and way of life of the aristocracy. They bought land in the countryside, had themselves ennobled, and transmitted their status to their descendants through the same mechanisms by which the feudal nobility kept prestige and property within lineages.¹⁵³ Urban elites in the Latin West could also make use of corporations and religious groups. The greater guilds, religious orders, the church, universities, militias, and other associations allowed notables to use some of the mechanisms that produced and reproduced elite status.

In China, on the other hand, it was by inserting some of their members into

¹⁵⁰ "Fa-lamā ṭalaba l'il-wizāra ittajā'a ilā zāwiyati-sh-shaykh Naṣr fa-li-dhālika kānat ḥurma-tuhu awfar min ḥurmati-l-wazīr w'a'zam": Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 141b. For another example of an appointment to the wizāra made because of the ḥurma of an individual see Jazārī, BN MS, 574. For a poet whose great ḥurma in the eyes of the ruling Ayyūbid households (*al-mulūk*) helped him get appointed wazīr, see Ibn Khalīkān, 4/110.

¹⁵¹ Jazārī, BN MS, 5a: "qad zāda (al-Malik al-Manṣūr) fī ḥurmatihi wa-ammarahu wa'aṭāḥu iqṭā'ī sitin fāris."

¹⁵² See Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 31a, for the loss of ḥurma leading to the plunder of an individual's wealth.

¹⁵³ On the adoption by urban elites of the way of life of the aristocracy see Bloch, *Feudal Society*, vol. I, 322–4.

the civil service that elite lineages in the Sung period sought to reproduce their status, and merchants and others sought to advance it.¹⁵⁴ Sung officials prevented merchants from controlling property securely or achieving legal invulnerability. The merchant families of the Sung period may have had a more secure hold on property than was the case with merchants in the Middle East, but they were still subject to predation by imperial officials as long as they lived in cities.¹⁵⁵ Nor could they turn autonomous corporate or religious groups and practices to their own benefit. The bureaucracy regularly seized the income and revenue sources of religious groups and foundations, although family foundations provided some security of property. Merchant families had two broad strategies of advancing their status, one through “bribery” and the other by introducing their sons into the civil service. Although the bureaucracy subjected merchants to an array of disabilities, not the least of which was disdain and social inferiority, merchant families struggled to place their sons in it through the educational system. The upper-class status of the gentry was based on land more than membership in the civil service, but the gentry used their control over land and their kinship connections to acquire education and office for their sons.¹⁵⁶ From the perspective of both groups, the “ladder of success” was to tilt the examination system in favor of their sons.¹⁵⁷

Because of the peculiarities of Middle Eastern politics, none of these possibilities was open to Damascenes. As we have seen, in the Middle East there were few aristocracies, corporate bodies, or state apparatuses into which

¹⁵⁴ See J. Chafee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning: a Social History of Examinations* (Cambridge, 1985) on the use of the examination in household survival and mobility strategies; E. Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (New Haven, 1964), 6–33; Smith, *Taxing Heaven's Storehouse*, 4, 5, 78–108; M. Weber, “The Chinese Literati,” in H. Gerth and C. W. Mills eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1958); T. H. C. Lee, “Sung Education Before Chu Hsi,” in W. T. de Bary and J.W. Chafee eds., *Neo-Confucian Education: the Formative Stage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 126–7; W. Chan, “Chu Hsi and the Academies,” in Bary and Chafee, *Neo-Confucian Education*, 389–413.

¹⁵⁵ E. Balazs, “Urban Developments,” in J. Liu ed., *Change in Sung China, Innovation or Reconstruction?* (Lexington, MA, 1969), 14; Balazs, “The Birth of Capitalism in China,” *JESHO* 3 (1960), 201–3.

¹⁵⁶ See Chafee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 10; Cf. Balazs, “The Birth of Capitalism in China,” 202; E.O. Reischauer and J.K. Fairbank, “China’s Early Modern Society,” in Liu, *Change in Sung China*, 2, 3.

¹⁵⁷ On the Sung period use by elites of the examination system, and on alternative paths of recruitment into the bureaucracy, see B. McKnight, “Mandarins as Legal Experts: Professional Learning in Sung China,” in Bary and Chafee, *Neo-Confucian Education*, 493–516; McKnight, *Village and Bureaucracy in Southern Sung China* (Chicago, 1972); Chafee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 10, 98–115; Chafee, “Education and Examinations in Sung Society,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1979), 176–208; E.A. Kracke, Jr., *The Civil Service in Early Sung China* (Cambridge, MA, 1953); T.H.C. Lee, *Government, Education, and Examinations in Sung China* (Hong Kong, 1975); Lee, “Sung Education,” 121–2. See Chafee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 23, 24; W. W. Lo, *An Introduction to the Civil Service of Sung China, with Emphasis on its Personnel Administration* (Honolulu, 1987), esp. 79–111 for the *yin* privilege or “imperial grace of protection” that gave elite families a safety net in introducing their progeny into the bureaucracy – but even here their sons had to take an examination, and half failed.

urban elites could insert themselves. Rulers were powerful enough – and physically close enough – to prevent the elite from establishing autonomous social bodies. Nor could the a^cyān transmit status through the meticulous maintenance of group boundaries, because group affiliations were fluid and the social circulation of the city was rapid. A^cyān households maneuvered within a form of domination in which rulers prevented the emergence of autonomous bodies, yet did not penetrate the city by effective state institutions.

We thus face a peculiar problem in trying to understand household strategies of social survival, a problem that mirrors the singular character of political power in the period. How did the a^cyān reproduce their status in a social environment that both medieval Europeans and Sung Chinese would have seen as lethal, one without the protections of permanent wealth, office, or corporation? As we have seen, in high medieval Damascus the social goal of the a^cyān was the manṣab, which had to be won by individuals. Yet the acquisition of mansabs was not “meritocratic” in any useful sense of the term. In understanding household strategies of survival, the question is how the a^cyān inculcated into their young the disposition to acquire the social and cultural “capital” that allowed them to participate in the struggle for manṣabs. Before considering how they acquired their cultural capital (as they themselves conceived of it) we should first examine in greater detail the dominant approach to relations between society and culture in the period – the madrasa.

CHAPTER 2

Madrasas, the production of knowledge, and the reproduction of elites

The study of madrasas would seem an ideal way of analyzing an institution that articulated relations among politics, cultural practices, and the strategies of social elites.¹ Scholars have generally believed that the appearance of madrasas in the high medieval Middle East transformed higher education. They have also often agreed that madrasas had structures and uses similar to the specialized institutions of higher education in other societies, especially in educating jurists and bureaucrats by providing them an advanced legal curriculum. This chapter examines the madrasas of high medieval Damascus to address two major questions. What was the relationship between the transmission of knowledge and the proliferation of household waqfs such as madrasas in the city? How did madrasas serve elite social and political strategies?

¹ Literature on madrasas includes: Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, 47–60; M. van Berchem, “Origine de la madrasa,” *Matériaux pour un corpus Inscriptionem Arabicorum*, I (Egypt: Mém, mis, arch. franç. au Caire) 19 (1894–1903), 254–65; J. Berkey, “Education and Society: Higher Religious Learning in Late Medieval Cairo (Egypt),” Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton, 1989); Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*; D. Brandenberg, *Die Madrasa: Ursprung, Entwicklung, Ausbreitung und kunstlerische Gestaltung der islamischen Moschee-Hochschule* (Graz, 1978); Y. Eche, *Les Bibliothèques arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie, et en Egypte au moyen âge* (Damascus, PIFD, 1967); I. Goldziher, “Education – Muslim,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. V, 198–207; Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, S.M. Stern and C.R. Barber trans. (London, 1971); H. Halm, “Die Anfänge der Madrasa,” *ZDMG*, suppl. III, 1, XIX (1977), 438–48; R. Hillenbrand, “Madrasa,” *EI* (2); Leiser, “The Endowment of the al-Zāhirīyya”; Leiser, “The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisūn, 495–647/1101–1249,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1976); Leiser, “The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East: the Case of Egypt,” *JARCE* 22 (1985). See especially G. Makdisi’s many articles and books in the bibliography. J. Pedersen, “Masjid,” *EI* (1); Pederson, “Some Aspects of the History of the Madrasa,” *IC* 3 (1929), 525–37; H. Shumaysi, *Madāris Dimashq fī al-‘asr al-ayyūbī* (Beirut, 1983); A. Shalabi, *History of Muslim Education* (Beirut, 1954); D. Sourdel, “Les professeurs de madrasa à Alep aux XIIe–XIIIe siècles d’après Ibn Shaddad,” *BEO* 13 (1949–51), 85–115; Sourdel, “Réflexions”; J. Sourdel-Thomine, “Locaux d’enseignements et madrasas dans l’islam médiéval,” *REI* 44 (1976), 185–98; A. Talas, *La Madrasa Nizāmiyya et son histoire* (Paris, 1939); A.L. Tibawi, “Origin and Character of the Madrasa,” *BSOAS* 25 (1962), 225–38; G.L. Wiet, “La Madrasa Khaidariyya, à Damas,” *Mélanges Gaudefroy-Demombynes* (Cairo, 1935–45); F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Academien der Araber und ihre Lehrer* (Göttingen, 1837).

As noted above, an earlier generation of scholars saw madrasas as institutions intended to develop the ideological cadres necessary for the “Sunni Revival.” George Makdisi, who performed such a signal service in demolishing these views, is himself a strong proponent of viewing madrasas as a form of “institutionalized education.”² Having argued successfully against earlier interpretations, Makdisi continues to see madrasas as having an organized and differentiated student body, a specialized curriculum, a professoriate certified to teach, and an institutional educational goal – the certification of teachers and jurists. Where Makdisi recognizes that much learning was private, he still sees the madrasa as the major institution of higher education. In this view, students followed “the basic undergraduate law course,” which led to “the license to teach.”³ Makdisi has been criticized for his use of anachronistic language, but at least it has the virtue of rendering the texts into familiar terms of reference. However, his interpretation of the structure of madrasas and the role they played in the specialization of education has remained dominant if not entirely unchallenged.

Other scholars have generally agreed with Makdisi that madrasas were a turning point in medieval cultural history. The outstanding political and social historians of the period have been interested in madrasas, both for the evidence they convey on other practices and for their roles in creating a unified cultural elite.⁴ With respect to Damascus, the foundation of large numbers of religious institutions has been interpreted as a turning point in the social and cultural history of the city. Some of the finest historians of the city have seen madrasas as specialized institutions intended by their founders to recruit, train, and support jurists and bureaucrats, under the supervision of rulers of the city.⁵

Although scholars have largely agreed that madrasas were specialized institutions of higher education, some have questioned the extent to which madrasas dominated or monopolized education. D. B. MacDonald was perhaps the first scholar to stress the “personal” nature of medieval Islamic education, and A.L. Tibawi made the first explicit defense of an idea that has been repeated regularly since. To Tibawi the basic institution of education was the teacher-student relationship, which he held did not change with the advent of the madrasas.⁶ Since then, Roy Mottahedeh has pointed out that many people who considered themselves learned in the Saljûk period were “outside the madrasa system,” and Lapidus has underlined the centrality of the study-

² Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 281.

³ *Ibid.*, 96, 281, 181.

⁴ See Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*; Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*; Petry, *The Civilian Elite*.

⁵ See Gilbert's suggestion that madrasas “professionalized” and “institutionalized” the scholarly elite: Gilbert, “The ‘Ulama’,” 58–60; and Humphreys' conclusion that “madrasas . . . would ensure a solid education in Shâfi‘i or Hanafi fiqh, under the supervision of the prince and his close associates, for all potential ‘ulama’ or bureaucrats”: Humphreys, “Politics and Architectural Patronage,” 166.

⁶ A.L. Tibawi, “Origin and Character of the Madrasa”; Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 282ff.

circle in the culture of the learned elite in the Mamlük period.⁷ Most recently, Jonathan Berkey has affirmed the “informal” character of Mamlük education and questioned the extent to which madrasas crowded out other forms of education.⁸

Yet these reservations have been largely a question of degree. Berkey’s study is perhaps the most detailed description of the informal character of education in high and late medieval Cairo, an observation that he illustrates with important new material. Berkey also shows how the formal characteristics of the various types of institutions supported by waqfs tended to blur into one another, especially in the late medieval era. Yet in spite of the many merits of his study Berkey never entirely disengaged from the paradigm he sought to criticize. Rejecting some of Makdisi’s views on the madrasa, Berkey still sought to analyze an “informal system of higher education,” in which madrasas were “the primary forum for religious instruction throughout the Islamic Middle East,” and “played a role of exceptional importance in the study and transmission of Islamic law and the religious sciences.”⁹ The examination of the madrasas also occupies the greater part of his book, because that was where his most original sources – the waqfiyyas – led him. Thus, while madrasas may not sustain all Goldziher’s or Makdisi’s interpretations, the idea that they were important institutions of higher learning that provided an advanced education to bureaucrats, jurists, teachers, and scholars has continued to inspire scholarship in the field. An even more dominant – and unexamined – idea is that a “system of education” is where elite strategies related to knowledge may be found.

This chapter will reexamine a number of these interpretations, at least insofar as they relate to high medieval Damascus. It will suggest that an examination of the uses of the madrasa within the social and political strategies of the a‘yān, rather than its institutional structures and routines, will produce a better understanding of its consequences. Furthermore, it will argue that studying the production of knowledge and the preparation of the young under the rubric of “higher education” is a fundamentally erroneous approach to relations between culture and society in the period.

These arguments address a single city, so one must ask whether what was true of madrasas in Damascus was also true elsewhere. Three considerations should be kept in mind. First, the material for Damascus has often been used as important sources on institutional histories of the madrasa. Second, none of the sources remarked that madrasas in Damascus had meanings, uses, and functions different from madrasas in other places in the high medieval period. Finally, the point of this study is to argue that cultural institutions and practices cannot be studied in isolation from their specific political and social contexts. Some of the uses of the madrasa discussed below will necessarily differ from their uses in other places and periods. Scholars who have studied

⁷ Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 140; Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 111.

⁸ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 20–7, 43, 216–18. ⁹ *Ibid.*, 7–9, 16.

madrasas in eleventh-century Khurasān, late medieval Cairo, or eighteenth-century Istanbul or Central Asia will notice differences from their periods and places. That is to be expected and even desired. The object of this chapter is to understand the uses of the madrasa by the elites of a single city over a defined period. It is interested neither in origins nor in outcomes. Its aim is to urge that such institutions be studied within the context of specific struggles, rather than to force a reinterpretation of the ever-elusive “universal template” by which “Islamic institutions” can be understood.

Madrasas as institutions of higher education

To illustrate how the aṣyān of Damascus saw madrasas, it will be useful for comparative purposes to examine the educational institutions of the contemporary civilizations of the high medieval Latin West and Sung China. It is not difficult to define the extent to which the universities and academies of the Latin West and Sung China were specialized institutions of higher education.

While in early medieval Europe the young sought out individual masters and worked with them in their study-circles, by the thirteenth century universities thrived on both sides of the Alps. The Latin university existed where rulers allowed other social bodies partial autonomy and self-government. In Europe, universities were corporate bodies, with the same charter-based liberties as other groups. Before the term “university” acquired its final meaning of a body of scholars or students, it meant any organized group. For this reason, universities were not necessarily tied to specific places, as these groups were free to move from one city to another, and some in fact did so.¹⁰ Universities as corporate bodies administered their wealth, their membership, and the granting of degrees. Together with other corporate groups, they were jealous of their autonomy, and struggled as institutions (or groups of individual corporations) against bishops and burghers, and occasionally against papal and royal authorities.¹¹ Universities also granted certificates of competence and membership and often had distinctive ceremonies of entrance and departure, curriculums, and organizational forms. Where it is just possible to conceive of the medieval Latin university without the state, it is impossible to conceive of it without its corporate organization and leadership.

By contrast, in Sung China imperial state structures, a learned officialdom, and a land-owning gentry survived the horse-warrior revolution that disrupted agrarian empires elsewhere. In the early Sung period the dynasty sought to reduce the control of the military over the administration by supplanting them with scholar-officials, and to reconcile new areas subjected

¹⁰ F. Herr, *The Medieval World. Europe from 1100 to 1350* (London, 1963), 196. This comparison of madrasas to universities is in part taken from, and in part in agreement with, G. Makdisi, “Madrasa and University in the Middle Ages,” *Islamica* 32 (1970), 255–64.

¹¹ Bourin-Derrau, *Temps d'équilibres*, 206–7; Herr, *The Medieval World*, 196–200.

to the dynasty's control.¹² In the Sung period government schools and the examination system bridged the gentry, the scholar-officials, the military, the imperial household, and disgruntled groups the dynasty tried to cultivate.¹³

Sung scholar-officials by definition were holders of a qualification granted by state agencies and produced by passing an examination. The examination system produced a status group of scholar-officials largely from among the military, gentry, and scholar-official families of the empire, though other elite groups – especially merchants – tried to turn their sons into officials through educational institutions. Although attempts to make school attendance mandatory for sitting the examinations ultimately failed, academies and universities as social institutions had an acculturating importance in Sung society second only to the family.¹⁴ The gentry and others competed to insert their sons into the civil service by enrolling them in imperial and private universities and academies. The imperial household controlled the curriculum by selecting and disseminating the classics that formed the subject matter of the examinations. The bureaucracy itself staffed the imperial university, administered the examination system, and took some of the winners. The Chinese university or academy is conceivable without the gentry who made their sons its students – indeed the inevitably dubious claim of the system was that it was open to all. These institutions are hardly conceivable however without the civil service that staffed and administered them, gave the examinations, and inducted successful candidates.¹⁵

In both cases educational institutions were at once the objects and instruments of the social and political strategies of powerful groups. In the Latin West, resistance to the patrimonial claims of ruling groups permitted corporate forms of organization such as universities to become powerful entities in their own right. The relationship of authorities of various kinds to universities was often fractious and conflict ridden as a result, and universities themselves had strong collective identities and structures. Universities also served other groups, through the provision of educated individuals to the church, state, and

¹² Lo, *Civil Service*, 58, 93; Chafee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 58.

¹³ Chafee, "Education and Examinations in Sung Society," 92–100, 208–12; Lee, "Sung Education," 108–20; Lee, "Life in the Schools of Sung China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (November, 1977), 52–60; Lo, *Civil Service*, 79–86, 90–111, 218; B. McKnight, "Mandarins as Legal Experts: Professional Learning in Sung China," in Bary and Chafee, *Neo-Confucian Education*, 493–516; E. Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*; T. Wei-Ming "The Sung Confucian Idea of Education: a Background Understanding," in Bary and Chafee, *Neo-Confucian Education*, 139–50.

¹⁴ Chafee, "Education and Examinations in Sung Society," 1, 208–12. It should be pointed out that even as educational institutions trained students in the classics that formed the subject matter of the examinations, there were nonetheless inevitable tensions between the Confucian imperative of moral cultivation – felt strongly by many in the schools – and the agonism of the examination system: Chafee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 184–6.

¹⁵ See Rodzinski, *A History of China*, vol. I, 119 for the contradiction between the apparent openness of the examinations to peasants and the practical limitation of entry to the sons of the rentier class.

religious orders and by giving a career path to the cadets of aristocratic families.¹⁶ In Sung China, cooperation among the dynasty, the civil service, and the gentry made intermediate institutions among them viable. In both China and the Latin West, the existence of strong organizations – corporations or state agencies – made formal education a useful or necessary preparation for induction into the administrative, corporate, or religious body in which the young man would spend his productive life.¹⁷ These educational institutions either controlled admission into social and political bodies or constituted social bodies themselves. It should be said that the universities of the Latin West and Sung China had no monopoly on the transmission of knowledge or culture, and in both places the acquisition of correct manners, correct deportment, and patronage were of great importance.¹⁸ However, both had administrations, curriculums, and certificates that correspond reasonably well to the modern usage of these terms.

At first glance, the madrasas of high medieval Damascus seem at least roughly comparable to the educational institutions of these other societies. They gave personal and political benefits to ruling elites, they usually supported a lecturer, many housed and fed seekers after knowledge, and they usually but by no means always occupied a specific building. Thus Makdisi's reference to them as "colleges" in the medieval European sense seems only logical. They also resembled colleges in the Latin West (in one or two cases) in that they provided for the recitation (or singing as the case may be) of sacred texts for their founders at specified times.¹⁹ Madrasas also resembled universities and academies in that they apparently imparted the legal knowledge and skills necessary to judges, officials, and scholars.

Yet in spite of these apparent similarities, were madrasas in high medieval Damascus part of a "system of higher education," however informal? Did Damascene madrasas have a curriculum, a privileged form of knowledge which they attempted to inculcate into students? Did they have any collective identity or organization? Did attendance at madrasas have anything to do with the transmission of elite status?

¹⁶ See W. J. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1987), 14–15, 118–46 for how relationships among educational capital, competence, birth, and patronage shaped career trajectories in fourteenth-century England.

¹⁷ This was also true of the Ottoman empire, where medreses and the scholars they trained were integrated into the bureaucracy: A. Ugur, *The Ottoman 'Ulemā in the mid-17th Century*, xxxvii–lxxiv; M. C. Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: the Ottoman Ulema in the Post Classical Age (1600–1800)* (Minneapolis, Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988).

¹⁸ See Chafee, "Education and Examinations," 78–9, on the transmission of Confucian learning in Buddhist temples in the early Sung period, and 90 on specialized institutions in the Northern Sung; Lo, *Civil Service*, 82, on the importance in the oral examination of manners and deportment acquired within the household; Lee, "The Schools of Sung China," 59, on the acquisition of general culture and connections in Sung universities; Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, 88–91 on apprenticeship, religious orders, and cathedral schools as institutions that bypassed the university, and 118–46 on the importance of patronage in addition to education to a student's prospects.

¹⁹ I owe this observation to a most enlightening conversation with William Courtenay.

Scholars have long noted that young people in the medieval Middle East sought out individual teachers rather than formal degree programs.²⁰ Scholars since Tibawi have remarked that the sources rarely mentioned study in madrasas in their biographies of their subjects.²¹ The biographical notices of Damascenes mentioned their subjects' residence at only one madrasa – the Niẓāmiyya of Baghdađ – because of the institution's great prestige as a gathering place for the foremost scholars of the period, and for the study-circles held there.²² When discussing education, the sources cited their subjects' masters or shaykhs, not their madrasas; as Berkey justly puts it in the case of Cairo, “an education was judged not on *loci* but on *personae*.²³

When the sources for Damascus mentioned madrasas in relation to a young person (and such a citation was rare), it was not as an institution in which he enrolled, but rather as a manṣab, consisting of a stipend (ma‘lūm, jāmikiyya) and a lodging.²⁴ We may see the provision of student manṣabs as a socially valuable and thus historically unproblematic educational project. The sources for Damascus, however, described the relationship of a student to a madrasa not in terms of “membership,” but rather as the exploitation of a source of revenue that supported an individual. Because madrasas represented manṣabs above all, students had few of the corporate student identities characteristic of the educational institutions of the Latin West.²⁵

A case in point is the early career of the great traditionist al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277). Having proved his ineptitude at commerce in his home village by “devoting himself to Qur’ān recitation instead of profits,” he made his way to Damascus at the age of nineteen to seek knowledge. Once in the city Nawawī asked Ibn ‘Abd al-Kāfi for advice, informed him of his purpose (a‘rafahu maqṣidahu), and was taken by him to al-Fazārī, one of the great shaykhs of the period. Nawawī studied with Fazārī and became his disciple (yulāzimahu). However, Nawawī had no lodging, and Fazārī could be no help to him in this respect, because he had at that time only the Ṣārimiyya madrasa, which had no rooms for students. Fazārī was obliged to send him on to Kamāl al-Dīn Ishāq,

²⁰ Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn., “Mahommedan Institutions,” 413–14. After praising the “university” as the “glory of Muslim education,” MacDonald cautioned that “the individual teacher, with his certificate, remained the object of the student; there was nothing corresponding to our general degrees.”

²¹ See Tibawi, “Origins and Character of the Madrasa,” 230–1; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 23; A.S. Tritton, *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages* (London, 1959).

²² For examples see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 35–6; Yūnīnī, 4/73; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/293. The Taqawiyā was called the Niẓāmiyya al-Shām, not because of the education provided, but because of the illustrious shaykhs who gathered there: Nu‘aymī, 1/84, 226; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 136–7; Yūnīnī, 4/143. ²³ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 23.

²⁴ An example of a rare citation of praise for a madrasa was Abū Shāma’s description of the Ḵālidīyya: “It is a refuge and a place of lodging (wa-hya‘l-mā‘wī wa-bihā‘l-mathwī)”: Abū Shāma, *al-Rawdatayn*, 1/214. The house of one of the Banū Qudāma was also known as “a refuge for the people (mā‘wī l-in-nās)": Ibn Rajab, 2/95.

²⁵ A rule-proving exception might seem to be the Bādharā‘iyya, which as a condition of its waqf stipulated that students there not be students elsewhere, and that they be devoted to seeking ‘ilm. The stipulation was condemned as the “cause of many evils”: Ibn Kathīr, 13/196.

who had the *manṣab* of the lecturer (*tadrīs*) of the Rawāḥīyya, “in order that he might find lodging and take one of its stipends” (*lī-yahṣul lahu bihā bayt wa-yartafiq bi-ma'lūmihā*). Nawawī then lodged there “because it had been built by a wealthy merchant,” and became Kamāl al-Dīn’s student.²⁶ There is some evidence that Nawawī felt uneasy at accepting a stipend.²⁷ In his own biographical notice Nawawī listed at length the shaykhs with whom he had studied (giving no special attention to Kamāl al-Dīn Ishāq), but made no mention of a madrasa.²⁸ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī left an account of his own arrival in Damascus from Baghdaḍ as a young man. He listed in some detail the shaykhs with whom he studied and the tombs he visited, but had not a word to say about madrasas.²⁹ Others were praised for refusing as much of the *jāmīkiyya* of a madrasa as they could.³⁰

Moreover, there is no evidence that the sons of the city’s *a'yān* resided in madrasas rather than their households. On the contrary, religious scruples and social dignity inhibited some from settling in madrasas. The 128-page biography of Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 744/1343–4) lists his every claim to intellectual distinction without specifying whether he ever resided when young in a madrasa at all.³¹ Taqī al-Dīn forbade his own sons to settle in madrasas until they were old enough to assume the *manṣab* of the lecturer in one.³² There is no evidence in the sources for medieval Damascus that students sought out specific madrasas, or, if they resided in one for a time, that they felt any special attachment to it. To students madrasas were stipends and residences – which they referred to as *manṣabs* – before they were anything else. And whether the children of *a'yān* households in Damascus ever resided in madrasas is a subject on which the sources maintain a relative if not utterly convincing silence – one broken only by the occasional hint that in fact they did not.

The words referring to students and teachers do not necessarily refer to holding a *manṣab* in a madrasa. There was no stable and specific term for a student engaged in full-time study. A *tilmīdh* was the disciple of a shaykh, not a student in a madrasa.³³ A *ṭālib* (pl. *ṭalaba*) was a seeker after knowledge, and usually though not always referred to one who sought out *ḥadīth*. The *ṭalaba* are occasionally referred to as a group, but there is no evidence that this group represented madrasa residents rather than young seekers after knowledge collectively. There were many other terms for students, including *mustafidūn* (those who seek benefit), *mushtaghilūn b'il-ilm* (those who work on, or are

²⁶ Ibn Shākir 21/163; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/264; Yūnīnī, 3/284–5; Nu'aymī, 1/108, 268; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Tabaqāt*, 4/254; Pouzet, *Damas*, 167.

²⁷ One of the stories related of Nawawī was that when he resided in a madrasa he ate only bread brought to him from his family outside Damascus: Ibn Shākir, 21/160.

²⁸ Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmā'*, 18, 19. ²⁹ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/517.

³⁰ Ibn Shākir, 21/160; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/242.

³¹ See Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, esp. 6–7 but also throughout the text.

³² Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/253.

³³ For examples see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/212, 213; Ibn Ḥajar, 1/81; Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 63a.

preoccupied by, knowledge) *muta'allimūn* (those who would become learned), and *faqīh* (one learned in law). None of these terms referred necessarily to full-time study in madrasas, and all of these terms occasionally referred to people who were not young residents in madrasas. Of these terms, “*faqīh*” and “*mutafaqqih*” referred more specifically to students in madrasas, especially in waqfiyyas and fatwās. But *faqīh* was also used in many other contexts, and often referred to the learned in general, while the verb *tafaqqaha*, from which the term *mutafaqqih* was taken, was regularly used of very young people who learned law at home.³⁴

Teachers also had few stable titles or honorifics. As the lists in biographical notices of shaykhs who taught individuals show, a large proportion of those who taught young people had no mansabs. Learned men were called shaykh or ‘ālim and learned women *shaykha* or ‘ālima; but none of these terms refers to an appointment in a madrasa. Moreover, the biographical dictionaries did not describe shaykhs with mansabs in strikingly different terms from shaykhs without them. When one of the great shaykhs of the city wrote an account of his career, he did not mention any of his mansabs in madrasas, although he had held some of the major ones in the city, but rather celebrated taking over a study-circle in the Umayyad Mosque that had been in existence through five famous shaykhs before him.³⁵ While the title mudarris or lecturer is often cited in biographies of shaykhs, and biographies often list the positions that shaykhs held, these citations are usually in a longer list of the mansabs that shaykhs held in their lifetimes. As was the case with students, the madrasa was a mansab and occasionally a residence for a shaykh; but the mudarris was not a distinctive occupational type comparable to the professor or the mandarin. Only on rare occasions did the sources refer to the lecturers of the city collectively as a group.³⁶

There is little evidence that holding a mansab in a madrasa was critical to a shaykh’s prestige. On the contrary, it appears that they expended some of their hard-won prestige to gain mansabs. There is abundant evidence that shaykhs who refused mansabs were all the more highly regarded, and that benefiting from the waqfs of madrasas was seen as possibly polluting or corrupting.³⁷ Nawawī, for one example, refused out of piety to support himself on his stipend (*jāmikiyya*) at the Ashrafiyya; instead he ate food grown

³⁴ For example see the *faqīh kabīr* who was *imām* at the Rawāhiyya: Ibn Ḥajar, 1/34; also the contrast of the *fugahā* to the *quḍā* that named several famous shaykhs among the former in Ibn Kathīr, 14/45; for *tafaqqaha* see Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/149: “tafaqqaha fi ṣigharīhi ‘alā wālidihī”; also Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 7.

³⁵ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/166; also Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 37 for a study-circle founded in the Umayyad Mosque by Ibn ‘Asākir.

³⁶ For one example see Ibn Khallikān, 2/464 in which it was said that someone’s books were mentioned by the lecturers in their lectures: “wa-qad dhakarāhā al-mudarrisūn fi durūsihim.”

³⁷ See Ibn Kathīr, 14/109; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/6; Ibn al-Ḥāfi, 1/14. See also Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/85 for a lecturer who resigned his mansab at the Rukniyya “out of piety” because he was unable to abide by one of the stipulations of the waqf: “tarakahā tawarru‘an.”

on his family's land.³⁸ Similarly, the chief qādī Najm al-Dīn Ibn Şaşrā (d. 723/1323) was said to have regretted having held the "worldly mansabs" of the major madrasas.³⁹ Conversely, as students sought out teachers outside madrasas, so might they have held the lecturer of a madrasa in disdain. Teachers in madrasas faced criticism for their absences and inferior teaching. A great teacher might just as well work with students in jail, as did Ibn Taymiyya from the tower in Alexandria.⁴⁰ Another rode his animal accompanied by two or three students who recited his texts in turn.⁴¹ It was a shaykh's prestige that got him a mansab, and not a mansab that put shaykhs in an occupational category.

Moreover, the lecturer was often not the only learned adult to reside in a madrasa. Founders of waqfs may have restricted residence in madrasas to young seekers after knowledge, but numerous adults also lived in them or benefited from waqf income in one way or another.⁴² Shaykhs who gave lessons in study-circles (ḥalqa) and who were known as authorities in one field or another resided in madrasas even when they did not have mansabs.⁴³ A distinguished scholar could also reside in a madrasa and receive a stipend there until a mansab opened up elsewhere.⁴⁴ Finally, secretaries, amīrs, and holders of other religious offices also lived in madrasas, even though there was no provision in waqfiyyas for their residence.⁴⁵ As madrasas had no corporate administrative body, and ruling groups did not interfere in their administration consistently, there was little to prevent mature adults from settling in them. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī wrote in a fatwā that the prevailing customs ('urf) of madrasas can be taken as conditions (*shart*) of the founder of the waqf, with respect to issues such as the permissibility of outsiders' entering the cells of the madrasa, attending open audiences (*majālis*, sg. *majlis*), and otherwise consuming resources and waqf income of the madrasa.⁴⁶

Words for "studying" or "learning," as for "teacher" and "student," were various, and had little to do specifically with madrasas. There was no term for entering a madrasa, or matriculating, or taking up studies in one, or

³⁸ He was said never to have touched the jāmīkiyya of a waqf out of the same ascetic resolve that had him season his food with no more than one condiment at a time: Yūnīnī, 3/288; Ibn Shākir, 21/160. See also Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī who refused to consume any of the income of his mansab at the Rukniyya because he did not make his five daily prayers there: Nu'aymī, 1/254.

³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, 14/106–7. ⁴⁰ See Ibn Kathīr, 14/49.

⁴¹ Ibn Khallikān, 3/27. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 43, for a shaykh who taught students while walking up and down the main street of Cairo with them.

⁴² See for example Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/672. A shaykh who was learned in a variety of fields including medicine resided in the 'Azīziyya where he gave lessons in different fields of knowledge to large numbers of people: Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, 689. Occasionally an old scholar would finish out his years by taking up residence in a madrasa: Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 638b.

⁴³ Even a mature man known as a heretic (*zindiq*) and philosopher took up residence at the Nūriyya al-Kubrā: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 200, 201. ⁴⁴ Jazārī, BN MS, 495–6.

⁴⁵ In 727/1326–7 for example the governor required bureaucrats and others who had put locks on their rooms in the 'Azīziyya to pay rent: Jazārī, Kop. MS, 128. For two amīrs who resided in the Ashrafiyya see Jazārī, BN MS, 348.

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *Fatāwā wa-masā'il* Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 'Abd al-Muṭī Amīn Qal'ajī ed. (Beirut, 1986), 1/369–70.

graduating from one.⁴⁷ The use of the term *darasa* to mean studying was rare.⁴⁸ Words loosely corresponding to “education” included *talab al-ilm* (to seek knowledge, a term that often but not exclusively referred to ḥadīth scholarship), *tashayyakha* (to take on a shaykh), *tafaqqaha* (to learn, especially law [*fiqh*] – which usually happened very early in a young person’s career, before leaving home) – *intafa'a* or *istifāda* (to benefit or seek benefit), and *ishtaghala* (to work on something or with someone).⁴⁹ None of these referred specifically to study in a madrasa. There was no term for following a prescribed course of study, or for studying in a madrasa or *dār al-hadīth*.

Madrasas themselves as institutional types were fluid.⁵⁰ When waqf income was no longer sufficient to keep up the terms of the waqfiyya, or when it was usurped by warriors, madrasas changed their forms easily. For example, in 697/1297–8 the Mu‘azzamiyya, one of the major madrasas on Mount Qāsyūn, became a mosque, the lecturer becoming its preacher (*khaṭib*), because the waqf income was no longer enough to support a madrasa.⁵¹ Moreover, a madrasa did not have to have anything at all to do with the transmission of knowledge to the young. Some madrasas had no stipends or places of

⁴⁷ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 171–80 contends that madrasas had a structured student body with classes of students, including beginning, intermediate, and advanced students, leading to “termination” after which graded ranks of graduate students began. His evidence is largely taken from legal literature, including Subkī’s *fatwās* and his son’s treatise entitled *Mu‘id al-nī‘am wa-mubid al-niqam*. Makdisi does not discuss the problematic nature of using these sources. The jurists usually mandated ideals before they described realities, and they tended to generalize the interests of their fraction of the a‘yān into immutable prescriptions. Taking such sources at face value one can easily formalize legal ideals and normative categories into institutional structures. In both Subkī’s *fatwās* and his son’s treatise the intent was not to describe student life, but rather to define categories of beneficiaries of waqf income. To that end, the younger Subkī related the obligations of recipients of waqf income to their attainments, the more advanced being obliged to contribute more than the new students. Makdisi summarizes these arguments, but does not deal with the possibility that these gradations did not refer to formal status or classes, but rather to general levels of attainment and categories of stipends. The *muntahi*, for example, taken by Makdisi to be a member of the “terminal class,” was described by Subkī in full: “The *muntahi*: he has a greater responsibility to discuss and debate than the others. If he should keep silent and take the *muntahi*’s stipend because he believes he is more learned than the others present (*al-hādirin*), he would not have been properly thankful for God’s favor,” Subkī, *Mu‘id al-nī‘am*, 155. All the evidence adduced by Makdisi for the existence of distinct classes among the residents of a madrasa can just as easily be interpreted as categories of stipends. Another question is the degree to which these categories were in fact applied to madrasas at all. As was the case with so many other legal treatises, Subkī may have been describing a situation that was more ideal than real. See also Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/253, 254, for confirmation in an anecdote that three categories existed among the residents of a madrasa. Association with the highest group (*tabaqā al-‘alyā*) was “merited” (*yastihiq*), the term used to describe suitability for mansābs generally. Here again what might appear to be distinct classes are just as likely to be categories of recipients of waqf income.

⁴⁸ Two of the few examples I have found are Ṣafadi, *A‘yān*, 12b; Ṣafadi, *al-Wāfi*, 10/269.

⁴⁹ For an example of *talaba* referring to other forms of education see Ibn Abi Usaybi‘a, 99, quoting Aristotle on his education, which he referred to as *ṭalabī l-il-ilm*. Most ways of expressing “to be a student” were transitive and referred to working with a teacher: “yatalamadhu lahu (he became his student),” “jalaṣa ash-shuyūkh (he sat in the company of shaykhs)”: Ibn Shākir, 21/119; Ibn Rajab, 2/46; Ibn Jamā‘a, 89.

⁵⁰ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 45–60, illustrates this point nicely for Cairo, as does Pouzet, *Damas*, 167 for Damascus. ⁵¹ Jazāri, BN MS, 477, 485.

residence for students. One shaykh, Ismā‘il Ibn Muḥammad al-Harrānī, founded a madrasa in his own large house, became its shaykh, and invited older scholars to reside in it.⁵²

Restricting higher education to the lecture (*dars*; pl. *durūs*) in a madrasa or a dār al-ḥadīth misses how most young people acquired knowledge – by working on texts with teachers and by attending lectures throughout the city. Words meaning “teaching” were *ishtīghāl aṭ-ṭalaba* (working with students) *nashr al-‘ilm* (disseminating ‘ilm), and especially *ifāda* (benefiting).⁵³ Because young people acquired ‘ilm by working on texts with shaykhs, lectures inside madrasas or outside them were not necessarily the principal vehicle of learning. Some shaykhs gave lectures in madrasas. Others did not. One of the greatest shaykhs in the city, Ibn Qādī Shuhba, known as *shaykh aṭ-ṭalaba* and *mufid aṭ-ṭalaba*, never gave a lecture.⁵⁴ Work with shaykhs and with one another on texts was the critical means by which the young acquired their learning, rather than a supplement to the lecture, which itself was often the public exposition of a preexisting text. In contrast to the near-total silence of the sources regarding attendance of lectures in madrasas, virtually all biographical notices of learned men and women recounted the shaykhs with whom they studied or whose circles they attended.

When young people resided in madrasas, they did not follow a specified course of instruction, and they did not necessarily study with the lecturer. Although I have found no exception in the case of Damascus to Makdisi’s observation that madrasas usually had a single lecturer, the lecturer was not necessarily the sole source of knowledge in the madrasa. Shaykhs who represented various fields were present. *Mu‘īds* (a lesser manṣab for a scholar or assistant to the lecturer), the teacher of Qur‘ān recitation (*shaykh al-iqrā‘*), the lecturer of grammar, residents, and outsiders also gave lectures or worked with students inside madrasas.⁵⁵ Although some young people maintained close relationships with lecturers, death notices often provide long lists of shaykhs without manṣabs with whom young people studied, and whose

⁵² Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 84b.

⁵³ See the example of the shaykh who resigned from the lectureship of a number of madrasas and lived quietly as the imām of the ‘Adiliyya al-Kubrā, still studying and “exercising” the students and “benefiting” them (*ishtīghāl aṭ-ṭalaba wa ifādatihim*): Yūnīnī 3/282.

⁵⁴ Ibn Kathīr, 14/126, 127.

⁵⁵ See Ibn Shākir 21/162 and Yūnīnī, 3/284–5, for an account of Nawāwī’s becoming the *mu‘īd* for his *mu‘īd*’s lectures. The minor employees in a madrasa or dār al-ḥadīth such as the Qur‘ān readers could also be scholars in a variety of fields, and not necessarily specialists in the field for which they received a stipend: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi, *Tabaqāt*, 4/247. One shaykh of Qur‘ān recitation gave lectures in his madrasa: Nu‘aymī, 1/323. See for another example the *khaṭīb* who taught in a madrasa: Ibn Kathīr, 13/173. Another example was the shaykh who upon retiring from a diwān resided in a dār al-ḥadīth, and was sought out by the ṭalaba: Yūnīnī 4/165. For another example of a resident in a madrasa in Cairo who delivered lectures see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/24. The functions of the *mu‘īd* may differ between Damascus and other places. Makdisi sees the *mu‘īd* as an “advanced graduate student” whose function was akin to (if not a model for) that of the *repetitor* in the universities: Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 193–5. In Damascus, the *mu‘īd* could be a mature man, and there is no record of a *mu‘īd* acting in the manner Makdisi suggested. Mature visitors were given stipends and lodging in madrasas and dār al-ḥadīths as *mu‘īds*: Ibn Shākir, 21/119, 162; Yūnīnī, 3/284, 285; Ibn Ḥajar, 2/61.

disciples they often became. The task for a young person was to select a shaykh and maintain a close relationship with him, and to study with as many distinguished shaykhs as possible. A young person's shaykh might or might not have been the lecturer of the madrasa in which he resided. When young people wanted to become shaykhs, they sought out the study-circle and intimacy with a shaykh.⁵⁶

In addition to intimacy with individual shaykhs, what emerges from virtually every page of the biographies of major figures is the large number of their shaykhs. A young person's shaykhs were not necessarily of his legal school (*madhhab*) nor did they necessarily have mansabs in madrasas.⁵⁷ The culture of the study-circle was the major form of high culture for the city's *a'yan*, and people of all madhhabs – and occasionally of different religious communities – joined them throughout their lifetimes.⁵⁸ Many shaykhs both with and without mansabs in madrasas had study-circles in which they delivered lectures in the Umayyad Mosque.⁵⁹ Other study-circles, including those in which women delivered lectures to other women, were in private houses.⁶⁰ Moreover, a mansab in lecturing could be established by waqf outside of a madrasa.⁶¹ The Umayyad Mosque itself had various mansabs for lecturers, including several customarily held by the chief *qādī* of various madhhabs.⁶² Finally, residents in madrasas could also encounter various shaykhs as employees, residents, hangers-on, and deputies. Two of the most important madrasas in the city – the ʿAdiliyya and the Taqawiyya – had as their prayer leaders (*imāms*) eminent *ṣūfīs*.⁶³ As older men lived in madrasas, they could teach students in the fields they had mastered, as was the case of the

⁵⁶ See Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 111, for the study-circle as the basis of 'ulamā' society; also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 86, for an example of the *ḥalqas* in the Mosque of ʿAmr in Fustāt.

⁵⁷ See for one example among many Dhahabi's biography of the Shāfi'i al-Nawawi in which he called the Ḥanbali Ibn Qudāma Nawawi's "greatest shaykh": Ibn Rajab, 2/305. For another example of how study-circles cut across madhhab lines see Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādi, *Tabaqāt*, 4/284.

⁵⁸ See for example Zarnūjī's comment: "The time for learning (extends) from the cradle to the grave," Zarnūjī, *Kitāb ta'lim al-muta'allam ṭariq al-ta'allum* (Beirut, 1981), 58. An older shaykh could "cleave to" the majlis of a younger one, or a study-circle could be composed of equals: see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/675, 676, 701. For a study-circle in munāẓara at the Umayyad Mosque that brought in the elite of all the madhhabs ("al-akābir min kulli madhhab") see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/341. For an example of a dars that brought in people from the four madhhabs and other learned adults see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/23. See also Gilbert, "The 'Ulama'," 118.

⁵⁹ Ibn Shākir 21/119, 162; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/57; Yūnīnī 3/207; Ibn Kathīr, 14/141 for an example of a shaykh who taught in his own madrasa and in the Umayyad Mosque. For an example of a lecturer with a *ḥalqa al-istiṭḥāḥ* in the Umayyad Mosque see Ibn Kathīr, 14/103. Another example is the dars given in the Hanbali study-circle (*ḥalqa al-hanābila*) which was endowed with a waqf: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/479. A Hanbali lecturer gave lectures both in his madrasa and in the Umayyad Mosque: Ibn Rajab, 2/150; another Hanbali had his own *ḥalqa* (*ḥalqa lahu*) in which he delivered lectures in fiqh: Ibn Rajab, 2/288. The *ḥalqa* was often a long-term regular session, which students could inherit from their teachers over generations: Nu'aymī, 1/248; Ibn Kathīr, 13/172–3.

⁶⁰ See Ibn Rajab, 2/6; Dhahabi, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, Köp. MS, 16; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 148.

⁶¹ For example the mansab of the lecturer at the Zāwiya al-Gharbiyya in the Umayyad Mosque: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 125. ⁶² Qalqashandi, 12/357.

⁶³ Jazāri, BN MS, 366; Yūnīnī, 3/161.

philosopher who resided in madrasas and “corrupted” the beliefs of the young.⁶⁴

There is little evidence in the sources that students considered themselves or were considered by others as a group with collective interests. It is difficult to specify what a student was. Moreover, many Damascenes who were not residents in madrasas or devoted to full-time study attended lectures and other occasions in which knowledge was transmitted. In Damascus there were no degrees, no enrollment into a student body, and no competition among certified or degreed graduates over induction into state, corporate, or religious bodies. What did occasionally animate collective student action was the defense of their mansabs. In 698/1298–9 the Iranian students in the Ḥanafi madrasas rioted over the refusal of the lecturer to permit one of their countrymen to reside in the Qalijiyya.⁶⁵ When students took collective action on other occasions it was to ensure that waqf income be distributed according to the terms of the waqf – in other words again to defend their hold on mansabs.⁶⁶ The conditions that gave students elsewhere common interests and identities were largely absent in Damascus.⁶⁷

Curriculum

Did the madrasas of Damascus have an established course of study that produced general cultural competence or certified expertise? Having abandoned the notion that madrasas produced theologians as the ideological cadres of the “Sunni Revival,” recent scholars have seen the madrasa as an institution intended to train jurists and sometimes bureaucrats. Albert Hourani summed up this dominant interpretation concisely: “The judges who administered the shari‘a were trained in special schools, the madrasas.”⁶⁸ The case that madrasas taught the sciences of the law (*shari‘a*) in order to produce a group of certified experts in law seems strong on its face. Some madrasa waqfiyyas in Syria and Egypt stipulated that the lecturer teach a certain subject within the broader range of the sciences of the shari‘a.⁶⁹ Moreover, according to jurists such as Subkī, the lecturer should give the lecture in the field for which the madrasa was established; if not, he was a “thief” of the waqf.⁷⁰ Finally, jurists regularly held that the lecturer was to be knowledgeable in fiqh, and most lecturers were in fact learned in the various fields of the law.⁷¹ This has understandably led scholars to concentrate on the legal “curriculum” of the madrasas.⁷²

The case, however, stands on the interpretation of two problematic categories of evidence. First, although foundation deeds are good evidence on the intentions of founders, they are less reliable on the actual administration of

⁶⁴ Ibn Kathīr, 13/218; see also Pouzet, *Damas*, 167 for the residence of mature adults in madrasas.

⁶⁵ Jazari, BN MS, 553–4. ⁶⁶ Jazari, Köp. MS, 61.

⁶⁷ See for comparison Lee, “Schools of Sung China,” 54–7.

⁶⁸ A. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 113–14.

⁶⁹ Subkī, *Mu‘id al-ni‘am*, 152–4. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷¹ Dhahabi, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 18, for the censure of a young lecturer deficient in fiqh.

⁷² Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 113; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 7.

waqfs. Even if the inaugural lecture was given in one of the sciences of the shari‘a, and there were lectures on the shari‘a in madrasas, there is little unambiguous evidence that madrasas in Damascus provided an advanced legal education that differed from the lectures and study-circles held elsewhere in the city. For all the attention that madrasas have received as providers of advanced legal education to their students, young people acquired advanced legal knowledge from their shaykhs long before the appearance of madrasas in the Middle East, as Muslims young and old do today in small study-circles all over the world. Second, jurists such as Subkī and Ibn Jamā‘a were not necessarily interested in describing actualities, but in condemning, for their own reasons, departures from the legal norms they defended. When Subkī wrote that the dars was to be given in the field stipulated by the founder, it is dangerous to assume that he intended to describe actual practices. He may just as well have been arguing on behalf of rules that were regularly ignored. In any case, Subkī’s assertions cannot be used as evidence without further confirmation – of which in the case of Damascus at least there is surprisingly little.

Moreover, although there is no doubt that teachers gave lectures in madrasas, there are some indications that the provision in waqfiyyas that the lecturer teach law was at the least a matter of debate. Ibn al-Şalāh wrote a fatwā in response to the question whether recipients of waqf income in madrasas had to study fiqh. His solution allowed the *fugahā* – those who had acquired some learning – to study other fields; only beginners – *al-mutafaqqiha* – were obliged to study law. Nor was attendance at lectures necessarily mandatory for young holders of manṣabs in madrasas. Ibn al-Şalāh wrote that recipients of waqf income in madrasas were obligated to attend lectures only if it were the prevailing custom (*urf ghālib*) of the madrasa.⁷³

What the lecturer taught, if he taught anything at all, depended on the terms of the waqf, on his own interests, and occasionally on the efforts of rulers to mandate or proscribe subjects. Lecturers taught and wrote in fields other than fiqh.⁷⁴ While the lecturer was often expected to lecture in one of the sciences of the shari‘a, many different forms of knowledge were taught, both in madrasas and in study-circles throughout the city.⁷⁵ Shaykhs taught the Hellenistic

⁷³ Ibn al-Şalāh, *Fatāwā*, 1/373–4.

⁷⁴ Prestige was attached to writing the basic texts for beginners (*qā‘ida*, pl. *qawā‘id*) in several fields. Shams al-Dīn al-İsfahānī wrote *qā‘idas* in four fields, including the ‘uṣūlayn, and logic: Ibn Kathīr, 13/315. See also *ibid.*, 14/75 for a lecturer who composed books in *kalām* and *uṣūl*. Ibn Abī Uṣaybī‘a, 646–7, cited two lecturers who were learned in medicine and the natural sciences, and who taught students in those fields in grand madrasas such as the Ḥāfiyya (where they were appointed in succession) and the Adhrāwiyya. For an example of the dars on various texts, in various fields, including logic and *uṣūl al-dīn*, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi, *Tabaqāt*, 4/256; see also the student who read both law and the poetry of al-Harīrī with Ibn ‘Asākir: Yūnīnī 4/165. Ibn Jamā‘a learned the same text from Ṣafadī: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/557. See also the shaykh who learned adab from Tāj al-Dīn al-Kindī: Ibn Abī Uṣaybī‘a, 663.

⁷⁵ A philosopher said to have been a student of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī lived in madrasas and was accused of corrupting the beliefs of the students: Abū Shāma, *Dhāyl*, 202; for a similar example see Ibn Kathīr, 13/218. Several lecturers were also physicians, and taught medicine to study-circles: see Ibn Abī Uṣaybī‘a, 647. One lecturer was best known for his ability to interpret dreams: Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, fol. 38a.

“rational” sciences in madrasas as elsewhere, in spite of attempts by the Ayyūbid rulers al-Mu‘azzam and al-Ashraf to forbid them.⁷⁶ There were also lecturers who were known as philosophers or ṣūfis, and there is no reason to suspect that they did not teach philosophy or ṣūfism in their madrasas or wherever they held their study-circles.⁷⁷ It is therefore probable that one reason jurists demanded that lecturers teach according to the stipulations of the waqf was that lecturers were doing just the opposite.

The third and most critical point is that attending lectures in law in madrasas was not how young people became learned shaykhs. Young people typically studied a variety of fields, in a variety of places, often with a different shaykh in each.⁷⁸ A shaykh could also teach a variety of fields in a single ḥalqa.⁷⁹ Shaykhs learned in various fields taught them also in study-circles throughout the city.⁸⁰ Shaykhs in the Umayyad Mosque and in other places held study-circles in various fields that thrived long after the appearance of madrasas in the city.⁸¹ If shaykhs taught law, poetry, medicine, philosophy, and other subjects in madrasas, they also taught these subjects elsewhere.

⁷⁶ Al-Ashraf, when he took power in 616, announced through the heralds that none of the fuqahā’ should study any of the sciences but tafsīr, ḥadīth, and fiqh: Ibn Kathīr, 13/148. He and his successor al-Mu‘azzam threatened to expel anyone who taught any of the rational sciences, and in fact did so in the case of Sayf al-Dīn al-Amīdī, who lost his mansab at the Azīziyya: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’at*, 8/681; Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 19; Ibn Kathīr, 13/148. However, this should not be taken as evidence that madrasas had a mandated curriculum in the sciences of the sharī‘a. Al-Ashraf and al-Mu‘azzam’s policies were not universal even among Ayyūbid sultāns. The rational sciences in the city flourished under al-Mu‘azzam ‘Isā, and al-Malik al-Nāṣir himself studied kālām with a student of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and was known to have studied the ‘ulūm al-awā’il as well: Ibn Kathīr, 13/124, 140–1, 198; Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt*, 5/144. Lecturers learned in the rational sciences are attested throughout the period. Sa‘īf al-Dīn al-Hindī, for example, who had a very successful career in the madrasas, was also a partisan of the rational sciences: Ibn Kathīr, 14/75. One of the most distinguished Ḥanafī lecturers in the city was also known as a mu’tazalī: Ibn Kathīr, 13/53. Another Ḥanafī taught logic and scholastic dialectic (jadal) in the Fārūkhshāhiyya madrasa and in the Umayyad Mosque: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāft*, 21/88. Nūr al-Dīn al-Ardibīlī (d. 749/1348–9), a shaykh who held manṣabs at such major madrasas as the Jūrūkhīyya and the Shāmiyya al-barrāniyya, was known as an uṣūlī and a student of the rational sciences: Nu‘aymī, 1/230.

⁷⁷ For examples of lecturers known as philosophers, see Ibn al-Suqā‘ī, 102 of the Arabic text; Dhahabī, *Tadhkīrat al-huffāz* (Hyderabad, 1955–8), 4/60. See Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/55–6, for a ṣūfi lecturer who had “aṣḥāb wa-muridūn.”

⁷⁸ For one example see Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Tabaqāt*, 4/255.

⁷⁹ See for one example Jazārī, BN MS, 320.

⁸⁰ There was a follower of Ibn al-Rawandī in the early seventh century: Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 37. Also see the study-circle held in the house of a shaykh learned in grammar and the rational sciences, attended by Muslims, Jews, Christians, heretics, and Samaritans: Yūnīnī, 2/165. See also the blind shaykh ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Ḥasan al-Irbilī (d. 660/1262), who read philosophy and rational sciences with Muslims, ahl al-kitāb, and philosophers: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/362; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāft*, 12/247; also the ḥalqa in the Umayyad mosque in which a shaykh taught the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī and other works of adab: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/346.

⁸¹ This conclusion runs counter to Gilbert’s thesis that “by degrees, specialized buildings replaced common teaching sites such as mosques, private homes, shops, libraries, and gardens”: Gilbert, “The ‘Ulāma’,” 59. For one example of a shaykh who arrived in the city to give lessons in the Umayyad Mosque see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ā, 688; for a ḥalqa al-istiṣḥāl in the Umayyad Mosque, see Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, fol. 47a; for a ḥalqa al-taṣdīr in the Umayyad Mosque established by a qādī, with a stipend of 100 dirhams, see Jazārī, BN MS, 476.

Some had stipends for teaching fields such as *belles lettres*.⁸² A shaykh known for his *hurma* held a study-circle in which Samaritans, Muslims, Jews, and Christians cultivated the Hellenistic sciences (*‘ulūm al-awā’il*) together.⁸³ Another shaykh was known for holding study-circles in the many fields of knowledge he had mastered, including one for Christians in the New Testament and one for Jews in the Torah.⁸⁴ Medical learning was acquired in much the same way as other fields, through working on individual texts with single shaykhs, and was described in similar language.⁸⁵ Madrasas in Damascus were useful spaces for the interactions of the learned, as well as mansabs for their residents and shaykhs. There is no doubt that they were important religious institutions, in that the learned often resided in them, prayed in them, interacted with one another in them, and taught students in them. But there is remarkably little evidence that they were specialized institutions of learning, as the knowledge that was transmitted in them was little different from that transmitted elsewhere. Most of what the young learned – in medicine, law, the Hellenistic or scholastic sciences, and other fields – was in fact transmitted as it had been previously, in relations between a single shaykh and a young person or small group of people. The production of knowledge – in readings, study-circles, recitations, and open audiences – was the main form of elite cultural life in the city, and people of all ages and varied intentions participated.⁸⁶ We can have no idea what it would be like to explain to a high medieval Damascene what “higher education” means, but we would fail if we used terms and concepts derived from modern experience. Our approaches have yet to explain how a young person became a learned shaykha or shaykh, why she or he would want to do so, and why others saw shaykhliness as such a valuable object of labor on the part of themselves and their children.

Finally, what emerges from the biographical notices of shaykhs is not only competence in law, but the wide range of their learning. The *a‘yān* of Damascus aimed for mastery (*riyāsa, imāma, siyāda*) in one or more subjects, which could be any one of those cultivated in the city, and knowledge of many fields. Entries in biographical dictionaries praised mastery of the fields of the law, but they also praised mastery in other subjects, including medicine, theology, mathematics, natural science, *belles lettres*, the Hellenistic sciences, and literature. The *a‘yān* valued poetry highly, as can be seen by the vast quantities of it quoted in the chronicles and biographical dictionaries, and many shaykhs tried to attain some distinction in it. Thus, even though many shaykhs were learned in law, and lecturers were expected to know something of it, the assertion that the madrasas were a form of higher education intended

⁸² One example was the shaykh who was given a monthly stipend of 100 dirhams for teaching al-Ḥarīrī’s *Maqāmāt* and other works of *adab* in the Umayyad Mosque, a sum equal to what many lecturers received: Ṣafadī, *al-Waqfī*, 18/23, 24.

⁸³ Yūnīnī, 2/165. ⁸⁴ Ibn Khallikān, 4/397.

⁸⁵ See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 603–768, for many examples of the training of physicians that *mutatis mutandis* could apply to other fields of knowledge cultivated in the city.

⁸⁶ For one example see Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 79a.

to produce specialists in law is both overstated and in some cases directly contradicted by the evidence. After all, there were qādīs all over the Islamic world long before the appearance of the madrasa, and in many cases they learned from the same books that the young read in Damascus, both inside madrasas and elsewhere.

In the education of the *a'yān*, exposure to many fields and many shaykhs was the ideal, rather than specialized training in single subjects. When biographers praised learned men, it was breadth of knowledge that they most lauded. A scholar learned in many fields was a “*kāmil*” (pl. *kamala*), a “complete” man.⁸⁷ Ibn Khallikān “acquired a good measure of learning in all fields”; while a writer praised another shaykh: “We never saw anyone who united more fields.”⁸⁸ One shaykh was lauded for writing a single book that embraced twenty separate fields of knowledge.⁸⁹ Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī praised his father as a polymath, “one who united every field of knowledge” (*jāmi‘ kull ilm*). At a time when he was also the disciple of a *ṣūfī* shaykh, the elder Subkī acquired *fiqh* (law), *ḥadīth* (accounts of the words and deeds of the Prophet taken as precedents in law and many other areas), *tafsīr* (the interpretation of the Qur’ān), *qirā'a* (Qur’ānic recitation), *kalām* (didactic theology), *uṣūl al-dīn* (speculative theology), *nahw* (grammar and syntax), *lughā* (lexicography), *adab* (belles lettres or moral conduct), medicine, scholastic dialectic, *khilāf* (points of difference among the law schools), logic, poetry, *fīraq* (heresiography), arithmetic, jurisprudence, and astronomy.⁹⁰ Other young people studied law and *ḥadīth* with noted jurists; and this did not prevent them from studying philosophy and Shī'ism with other shaykhs.⁹¹ The fields of knowledge were not specialized in the sense that mastering one field precluded studying others. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's dictionary of physicians demonstrates that many physicians were also learned in belles lettres and the sciences of the law, and that many jurists in turn were learned in medicine.⁹² And in no case did a death notice in a biographical dictionary assert that its subject studied law in a madrasa and other subjects outside it.

⁸⁷ See for example the “*kāmil*” who knew law, astronomy and the use of astronomical instruments, history, the methods of government of the Mongols, Turks, and Indians, biographies of scholars, composition, diplomatic correspondence, and geometry: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/159. Another example was a member of the Banū Fāriqī who died in 689: Jazārī, BN MS, 2.

⁸⁸ “*Hasala min kulli fannin ṭarafan jayyadan*”: Yūnīnī, 4/150. “*Mā rā'a yānā ajma‘ li-funūn al-‘ilmī minhu*”: Nu‘aymī, 1/227. ⁸⁹ Ibn Kathīr, 13/337.

⁹⁰ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/146–7, 150, 168–9; Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 3; also 41–4 for knowledge of the standard works of other madhhabs; Ṣafadī, 21/253–7; Ibn Kathīr, 14/252; Ibn Ḥajar, 3/134; Nu‘aymī, 1/134–5.

⁹¹ Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, fol. 47a. After his studies in philosophy and shī'ism, one student went on to deliver lectures and *fatwās*.

⁹² For five consecutive examples, including chief qādīs who were also physicians, see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, 646–51; also, Jazārī, BN MS, 320–1; Nu‘aymī, 1/229; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/396. See Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/48–9 for a physician who was known for learning the *Maqāmāt*, and who studied belles lettres, *adab*, and grammar, along with medicine and the rational sciences. He also copied out Avicenna's *Qānūn* three times. See *ibid.*, 2/316 for a physician learned in a variety of fields including architecture and astronomy.

There is little evidence that the madrasas marginalized fields other than law or that madrasas had a “curriculum” in law. Young people sought out shaykhs and studied with them in convenient locations – one hesitates to call it “private” or “informal” education because the categories of public/private and formal/informal are so problematically derived from Western experience. When young people set out to become learned shaykhs there is no evidence that they sought out an established curriculum. It is difficult to prove a negative, but scholars have been so committed to the notion that madrasas had a curriculum in law that reviewing the sources for high medieval Damascus can at the very least demonstrate a major exception. Moreover, in high medieval Arabic there is no word for “curriculum,” “list of books,” or “program of study.” In the large literature for high medieval Damascus there is no evidence that students sought out prescribed programs of study, or enrolled in madrasas to master a specific body of knowledge. Rather, they chose their subjects for themselves, and sought out shaykhs who could “benefit” them.⁹³

Writers of advice to young people stressed the voluntaristic nature of the subject matter of education. The young were told to seek advice constantly, because they made their own decisions.⁹⁴ “When undertaking the study of knowledge,” Zarnūjī advised, “it is necessary to choose among all the branches of learning the one most beneficial to oneself.”⁹⁵ Similar advice was given with respect to teachers: “regarding the choice of a teacher, it is important to select the most learned, the most pious, and the most advanced in years.”⁹⁶ As the case of Nawawī illustrates, young people did not come to the city to enroll in specific madrasas for specific purposes, but rather sought advice concerning the teachers with whom they should study.⁹⁷ The case of Subkī is even more suggestive: it is difficult to imagine a mandarin refusing to allow his son to attend an academy until he had obtained mandarin status. In all the literature for high medieval Damascus there is not a single citation that this writer has found that any young person – much less one from an a‘yān household – enrolled in a madrasa to acquire certified mastery of law. The notion that there was a curriculum in the madrasas has thus formalized the intentions of waqf and juristic prescriptions into an institutional “system.” There is little evidence that in Damascus madrasas expelled non-shārī‘a sciences from the city, and still less that they imposed their own advanced legal curriculum. The best available evidence suggests that the young acquired their learning – among which was their legal learning – and their distinction from individual shaykhs before and after the appearance of madrasas in the city.

Certification and qualification

Did madrasas produce a qualification or certificate of competence that had a social value? The uses and value of the qualification granted by the universities

⁹³ For a fuller discussion of benefit see chapter 3 below. ⁹⁴ Zarnūjī, 29. ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* ⁹⁷ Ibn Shākir, 21/163; Yūnīnī, 3/284–5.

and academies of the Latin West and Sung China are unmistakable. In both places a number of full-time students struggled to attain the degree. Makdisi holds that madrasas in Damascus were intended to produce a certified competence at least roughly comparable to that produced by the degree or the examination. He writes that the object of education was the *ijāza l'il-iftā'* and the *ijāza l'il-tadrīs*, certificates which granted the recipient the authority to issue fatwās and to teach: "The madrasa and the university in the Middle Ages had this in common: that they both had titular professors who had acceded to the professorship after having been duly licensed to teach."⁹⁸ Where the two differ, he holds, is in that the *ijāza* was granted by an individual, whereas the *licentia* was granted by the university as a corporation. This difference was only a matter of the identity of the authorizing body, as the granting of the *ijāza* was a formal process, completed only after "an oral examination satisfying the examining scholar as to the competence of the candidate," a competence which was demonstrated through mastery of disputation.⁹⁹

However, in spite of the instructive contrasts he has drawn between the *ijāza* and the *licentia docendi*, Makdisi has not successfully demonstrated that the granting of the authority to write fatwās or to teach had anything to do with madrasas. There is no unambiguous evidence that lecturers gave *ijāzas* to students through such an examination in Damascus, or in fact that any type of the *ijāza* had any association with madrasas at all. As scholars have long recognized, the lecture was not restricted to madrasas. Moreover, the biographical dictionaries rarely if ever described lecturers as holders of an *ijāza li'l-tadrīs*. There were, however, shaykhs without manṣabs who gave *ijāzas*. There were even fathers who got *ijāzas* for their sons by requesting them from many different shaykhs, a process they called *istijāza*, "seeking *ijāzas*".¹⁰⁰

The forms *ijāzas* took, and how they were described and granted, make it difficult to credit the idea that the *ijāza* was a formal certificate or "system" for transmitting authority.¹⁰¹ There were several different types of *ijāza*.¹⁰² In Damascus the sources cited the *ijāza li'l-tadrīs* less frequently than the *ijāza l'il-iftā'* and the *ijāza li'l-takallum*. The latter referred to the ability to discourse on behalf of the shaykh, and may occasionally have referred especially if not uniquely to matters of doctrine. Like the other *ijāzas* it was granted by a single shaykh.¹⁰³ These forms of authorization were not necessarily attested by a certificate, but were often expressed as much by the verbal form *yujūzu* as

⁹⁸ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 270; also 147–52, 270–2. ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁰⁰ Ṣafadi, *al-Wājīt*, 7/247: "His father sought out *ijāzas* for him, from the shaykhs of his time, from Egypt and Syria (*istajāza lahu wāliduhu mashayakha 'aṣrihi mina'd-diyār al-miṣriyya w'ash-shām*)."

¹⁰¹ Berkey like Makdisi stresses that the *ijāza* was granted by a single shaykh to a single disciple, but unlike him makes no association of the *ijāza* with the madrasa. Still he tends to formalize the granting of *ijāzas*, writing of an "ijāza system" which was subject to "abuses": Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 31.

¹⁰² For a detailed treatment of the *ijāza* as it applied to ḥadīth scholarship see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Maqaddima*, 262–77.

¹⁰³ For examples, Ibn Kathīr, 14/115; Jazārī, Köp. MS, 495; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/710.

through the verbal noun *ijāza*, and also by other verbs such as *adhana* or *aḥsana*.¹⁰⁴ These forms of the *ijāza* were granted when shaykhs deemed disciples ready to represent a body of knowledge and to exemplify its other carriers.¹⁰⁵ The *ijāza* did not necessarily refer to a single text, as shaykhs gave *ijāzas* for their knowledge as a whole or for a body of texts that they had learned.¹⁰⁶ In Damascus this may have included some kind of examination, but I have found no record of any ever having been given.

The *ijāza* as a form of “qualification” seems to have had little to do with madrasas. An extreme though revealing example of how Damascenes imagined the transmission of authority can be seen in how a blind holy man was persuaded to give an unpromising disciple permission to discourse (*adhana fi'l-kalām*). The disciple, whom the shaykh had previously forbidden to discourse, had a vision of an interlocked chain in the sky. When he recounted the dream to his shaykh, the shaykh interpreted the meaning of the chain to be the *sunna* (normative pattern of conduct and belief derived from accounts of the Prophet’s words and deeds) of the Prophet. After the vision the shaykh for the first time permitted the disciple to discourse in public.¹⁰⁷

That the *ijāza* was not given as a result of study in madrasas is attested by the fact that even amīrs could acquire one, as was true of one governor of Egypt.¹⁰⁸ As a sign of the transmission of authority from shaykh to disciple, the *ijāza* was not a passport of entry into a category of persons, nor was it an institutional degree. It differed from the examination in China, the passing of which established a group of mandarins defined by their possession of a formal qualification. The *ijāza* was rather the sign of an authority that was transmitted within temporary social networks bound together through loyalties of love and service.¹⁰⁹ This authority was acquired through an *ijāza* from another shaykh, who himself had acquired it through personal contact. The ability to grant an *ijāza* was not restricted to holders of manṣabs, but was held by other bearers of ‘ilm as well. What was granted was as much an emblem of a bond to a shaykh as a certificate with a fixed value in social relations. In this respect the *ijāza* resembled inclusion in the “register of auditors” kept in the mosque of Mount Qasyūn and other pieces of writing (markings in books, lists of auditors at open audiences, etc.) attesting to learning.

¹⁰⁴ For the qualification of an *ijāza* as a written one (*ijāza b' il-khaṭṭ*) see Ṣafadi, *A'yān*, fol. 122b.

¹⁰⁵ One shaykh for example acquired permission to deliver fatwās from a shaykh while the two were traveling to Egypt: Ṣafadi, *A'yān*, 14b.

¹⁰⁶ See Ibn al-Salāh, *Muqaddima*, 265–7 for examples of *ijāzas* granted for “all my texts,” or “all the accounts I have audited”; also Ibn Khallikān, 6/83.

¹⁰⁷ Yūnīnī, 1/396; Ṣafadi, *al-Wāfi*, 10/245 adds that the shaykh told the disciple, “now divine benefit (an-ni'ma) has descended upon you, my son.” Another story that demonstrated the shaykh’s paranormal knowledge is conveyed in Yūnīnī, 1/403. One day the shaykh approached someone and told him, “You have eaten ḥarām food. I see smoke coming out of your mouth.” The man returned to where he had taken his last meal and discovered that what the shaykh said was true.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Kathīr, 14/155. See Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 155–60 for ḥadīth transmission among the mamlūks of Cairo.

¹⁰⁹ On loyalties of love (*ḥubb*) and service (*khidma*) see below, chapter 4.

Where scholars have examined the *ijāza* as a marker of capacity, the sources rarely relate *ijāzas* to the exploitation of waqf income at all. In *fatwās*, biographical dictionaries, and chronicles the possession or absence of *ijāzas* is rarely a matter of debate. *Ijāzas* seem to have been a small stake in social competition compared to the degree or the examination in the Latin West or China. This is not to say, however, that the sources were uninterested in what we would call “qualification” or “capacity” when it came to competition over *mansabs*. Regularly, with respect to students, lecturers, *qādīs*, and others – in other words with respect to anyone who held a *mansab* – sources debated the question of “suitability” (*istiḥqāq*), in the same manner as *amīrs* and soldiers were inspected for their *istiḥqāq* for *iqtās* and soldiers’ pay (*jāmikiyya*).¹¹⁰ With regard to knowledge and distinction, the *ijāza* was just one part of a larger category of documents that attested to their learning; with regard to anything resembling temporary entitlement or capacity we must look elsewhere.

Madrasas in Damascus did not provide the *aṣyān* of the city with cultural distinction, specialized knowledge, or formal qualifications, and they had many uses that had nothing to do with education. Following the establishment of large numbers of madrasas in the city, knowledge continued to be transmitted as it had been before – within lineages and groups of scholars tied together by bonds of love and service. Madrasas were foundations established in the interests of their founders, who were for the most part neither students nor teachers. As charitable foundations, they were a means by which elite households associated the prestige of *ilm* and the protection of waqf with their own strategies. Madrasas were instruments by which the ruling elite controlled property. They were also useful to the ruling elite in providing a means of supporting the civilian elites upon whom they depended as a channel of influence into the city, as agents of social control and legitimization, and as religious specialists. Madrasas also provided useful platforms for their public activities and instruments of their political strategies. But in Damascus there is little evidence that they became specialized institutions of higher education in any useful sense of the term.

However, this is not to say that madrasas were without consequences for the *aṣyān*. If madrasas did not in fact represent an institutionalized form of higher education, what effect did the establishment of madrasas have on the social and cultural struggles of the civilian elite? The next chapter examines how the proliferation of relatively large numbers of *mansabs* transformed at once the arena and the prizes of their struggles for survival and success.

¹¹⁰ On *istiḥqāq* see chapter 1, notes 142–5.

CHAPTER 3

Mansabs and the logic of fitna

A previous chapter has discussed how warriors ruled the city by making political and social use out of the foundation of “private” and “charitable” institutions such as waqfs. This chapter will examine the consequences for the *a'yān* of the implantation of large numbers of household foundations in the city. The issue that this chapter will address is how the foundation of madrasas transformed *a'yān* social strategies. It will suggest that the principal consequence of madrasas was to provide a package of prizes that changed the nature of *a'yān* social competition.

To the *a'yān*, madrasas were important religious and social institutions, with many purposes that had nothing to do with education. The learned elite not only often resided in madrasas, they used these institutions as stages for some of their important ceremonies, including the investiture of the chief *qādī*, Friday prayer, weddings, and ceremonies of mourning.¹ The *a'yān* also resided, housed visitors, and imprisoned one another in madrasas under their control.²

¹ In the Mamlük period, when a new chief *qādī* was appointed, he was given the appropriate robe of honor, whereupon he went to either the palace (*dār al-su'āda*) or the Umayyad Mosque, where the appointment was read out in public, then returned to his madrasa, where the appointment was read out again in the main *iwān*. He then judged cases brought to him: Ibn Kathīr, 14/129, 153, 166; Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 60, 255. For Friday prayer in the Shāmiyya al-Barrāniyya see Nu'aymī, 1/294; Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 258; in the 'Ādiliyya: Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 9; wedding: Ibn Kathīr, 13/330; mourning: Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 536; Jazārī, BN MS, 580–1.

² For imprisonment in madrasas see Jazārī, BN MS, 237, 239; Ibn Kathīr, 13/302, 14/38, 70; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 173; Nu'aymī, 1/269. For madrasas as residences see Ibn Kathīr, 14/111, 148; Yūnīnī, 2/53, 350; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 85, 110, 137, 239; Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 225; Jazārī, BN MS, 347; Nu'aymī 1/268. A wealthy Hanbali founded a *ribāt* as a place of refuge for the 'ulamā' of Jerusalem during the crusades: Ibn Kathīr, 13/ 64. Visitors housed in madrasas: Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 453, 589; Ibn Kathīr, 14/98; Nu'aymī, 1/196. See Ibn al-Dawādārī, 9/27 for the residence of the shaykh al-shuyūkh in the 'Ādiliyya; also Yūnīnī 1/453 for the stay of the 'Abbāsid caliph in the Nāsirīyya. Other religious buildings in the city were also used as residences. Three hundred people were living in the storerooms of the Umayyad Mosque when Baybars ordered them to decamp in 665/1266–7: Ibn Kathīr, 13/248. People also lived in the minarets of the Umayyad Mosque: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 198, 217. It is also possible that madrasas were used to house visiting merchants, though the evidence for this is ambiguous and inconclusive: see for example Jazārī, BN MS, 553–4. See also G. Leiser, “Notes on the Madrasa in Medieval Islamic Society,” *MW* 76 (1986), 19–20 for uses of madrasas as hostels. For the economic impact of madrasas in neighborhoods in Mamlük Cairo see Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 188–201; Leiser, “Notes,” 20–3.

Perhaps the major consequence of the foundation of madrasas in Damascus was the competition for mansabs that resulted, and the transformation of elite social life that the proliferation of monetized honors inaugurated. It is difficult to deduce how many lecturers there were from the number of mansabs available. Mansabs were rarely held for a lifetime, many lecturers held more than one mansab, mansabs were held like iqṭā's and other property in "shares" (*mushāraka*) and many people were supported as "deputies" (*nā'ib*) of an absent lecturer. Moreover, the sources rarely cite the dates of an appointment, so it is impossible to determine how many mansab-holders there were at a given moment. There were also scholars who were supported through the madrasa endowments as holders of lesser mansabs or as residents.³ However, even though it is impossible to establish the number of competitors for mansabs at any one time, it is clear that the proliferation of mansabs established the arena of competition within which most a'yān families struggled.

Fitna over mansabs

Competition over mansabs established by waqf strongly resembled amīrs' competition over iqṭā's. As mentioned above, scholars often see the divide between civilians and the military as something of a social absolute. But the relationship of the two groups to property, their strategies of social survival, and their view and realization of social competition were similar. Even the categories of "social" civilian and "political" military competition introduce a misleading and anachronistic distinction.

The organization of elite social competition around monetized honors characterized both amīrs and a'yān, and both groups used similar language to represent their environments and their struggles within them. Amīrs and a'yān alike sought a *rutba* or rank, which meant both appointment and reputation.⁴ A'yān and amīrs competed for an appointment that brought with it a revenue source or stipend, and often a robe of honor. Appointments to mansabs and imras could be divided into shares, which were often held in numerical fractions (half: *nisf* or quarter: *rub'*), or temporarily by deputies (*nā'ib*).⁵ Secretaries, amīrs, shaykhs, and other beneficiaries of waqfs all "took in hand" (*bāshara*) their revenue sources, and could be "stripped" (*khulfa*) of

³ See for one example the very distinguished shaykh Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmīdī, who supported himself in Cairo as the mu'īd of the madrasa at Shāfi'i's tomb: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/346.

⁴ Both groups also used the term "rataba lahu" to indicate appointment: Yūnīnī, 2/223. For rutba as reputation or prestige see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 11/200: "wa-lam tazil rutbatuhu 'inda'l-mulūk ta'lū wa tazdād ilā ākhiri'l-waqt"; also Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/217, 253, for rutbas with respect to fields of knowledge.

⁵ For a "share" (*mushāraka*) in a revenue source for both a'yān and amīrs see Ibn Shākir, 21/37; Yūnīnī, 2/223. See Nu'aymī, 1/235 for a half-share (*nisf*) of a revenue source; Nu'aymī, 1/287 for a father who left his mansabs in *niṣfs* to his two sons. *Nā'ib* as a temporary military command: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 11/36; *nā'ib* as a *wazīfa* see Nu'aymī, 1/235, 239, 251, 254. See also Yūnīnī, 2/223; Ibn Shākir, 21/37.

them or “dismissed” (*azala*) from them. These groups could receive another imra or mansab as “recompense” (*iwad*) for one they lost.⁶ They “resigned” (*nazala*) in favor of their intimates and protégés while they had the power to do so.⁷ Shaykhs “competed” (*zāhama*) with one another over mansabs, as amīrs “competed” over iqṭā^cs. Scholars “seized” (*intaza^ca*, or *intaza^ca min yad*) the mansabs of others, as rulers “seized” cities and fortresses and amīrs nabbed each others’ iqṭā^cs.⁸ Amīrs and shaykhs both feared open competition as “factional disorder” (*asabiyya* or *fitna*), or enmity (*adāwa*).⁹ In the case of amīrs and scholars alike, the “rules” they occasionally pointed to neither established nor described the terms of the competition. What we have interpreted in the sources as descriptions of rules was often part of the ordinance directed by one side against another in competitive struggle.

The hold of a civilian on a mansab was similar in many respects to the hold of an amīr on an iqṭā^c. Neither had a legally enforceable title to office or revenue. Stipulations in waqfiyyas were in theory sacrosanct, but in practice were often suppressed. The case of Ibn Rawāḥa, founder of the Rawāḥiyya, is especially revealing in this respect. His desire to be buried in his madrasa was thwarted by the first lecturer; his stipulation that no Jew, Christian, or Ḥashawī (by which he meant Ḥanbalī) be permitted to enter was abrogated by a qādī; and the administrator he appointed lost his post to two shaykhs living in the neighborhood who swore that Ibn Rawāḥa had promised to give it to them.¹⁰ Strictly speaking, the mansabs were not fee benefices. They were not alienable or inheritable, and a claim to a mansab could not generally be enforced through a qādī. The one possible exception to this was when an endowment deed specified that the mansab go to the lecturer and his progeny. Since such a stipulation was usually hedged in by a restriction such as “those of his line who are qualified to hold the position,” it should not be taken as evidence of a prescriptive right. An example was when the amīr al-Qaymarī appointed ʻAlī Ibn Muḥammad al-Shahrazūrī to the lectureship of his madrasa, to be followed by those of his progeny who were qualified. The son of

⁶ For bāshara as receipt of waqf income, see Șafadī, *A^cyān*, 203b; Ibn Kathīr, 14/30; for dismissal of an amīr see Șafadī, *A^cyān*, 89b. For the ‘iwad of an amīr, who received iqṭā^cs in return for others stripped from him, see Jazārī, BN MS, 122. For an Ayyūbid prince who received one province as ‘iwad for another see Ibn Khallikān, 4/173, 176. ‘Iwad also referred to taking a post in the place of someone – as was the case of the sūltān who sat on the throne in the place of his father – “jalasa fi takht al-mulk ‘iwad wālidīhi”: Jazārī, BN MS, 247. Finally, an amīr or ruler could receive another city as ‘iwad for one he had lost: Ibn al-ʻAdīm, *Zubda*, 145.

⁷ For the nuzūl or the passing on of a post from one person to another, especially from fathers to sons or other members of their lineages, see Șafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 12/364; for the passing on of an imra as nuzūl. Also see below, notes 15–23.

⁸ For examples of warrior and learned intiza^c see Ibn Wāṣil, 4/231; Ibn Kathīr, 13/320, 336; Yūnīnī, 2/213; Nuʻaymī, 1/220, 303, 304, 316; Ibn Khallikān, 4/174.

⁹ On competition over mansabs as ‘asabiyya or fitna see Yūnīnī 3/192–3; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir^cāt*, 8/771; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/252, 253; Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, 2/19. For factional enmities as ‘adāwa see Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/236; Ibn Kathīr, 14/48, 49.

¹⁰ Dhahabī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Jazārī*, Köp. MS, 26; Ibn Shaddad, 2/241; Nuʻaymī, 1/265, 274; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 136–7, 149, 187, 189; Ibn Kathīr, 13/116, 168, 304.

the first lecturer took over his father's post without a hitch. But in the third generation a dispute over the mansab caused 'asabiyya. The grandson of the first lecturer was not old enough to take the post when his father died, and had to wait until his suitability (*istiḥqāq*) was established. When the young man matured, his character and general fitness (*rushd wa-ahliyya*) were considered good enough, even though his knowledge of law was meager. The "temporary" holder of the post tried to make it permanent, and the case ended up in front of a qādī, who held in favor of the grandson. When he took the post, he began to study law, and eventually did become capable, and was even beloved by the students. He was the last of the Shahrazūrī lineage to control the mansab.¹¹ As this example underlines, even if a stipulation in a waqfiyya was occasionally enforceable through a qādī, after a few generations the absence of a suitable candidate or usurpation often took the mansab away from the control of the lineage.¹² Otherwise shaykhs won mansabs by struggling for them.

As mansabs were not inherited or attained through examination, and there was no concept of a "right" to them, acquiring and holding onto a mansab was usually a reward for political dexterity. Relatively few lecturers lingered in a single post for a lifetime. Most engaged in a continuous play of seizing, resigning, increasing, trading or passing on, and defending their mansabs. Some acquired whole galaxies of offices.¹³ The waqf of the founder could forbid holding more than one post, but such a condition was rare, and in any case was regularly ignored.¹⁴ Designation of a lineage in a waqf document was also relatively unusual.

More common was the temporary control an individual or lineage had over the mansab of a madrasa.¹⁵ This temporary control was often expressed as *nuzūl* – the "descent" or passing on of a post from its holder to some other.¹⁶ Lecturers often chose their successors, and resigned in favor of sons, intimates, or men who paid them to move on.¹⁷ Shaykhs also passed on appointments to their students.¹⁸ Moreover, families negotiated with one another over man-

¹¹ Ibn Kathīr, 13/272–3, 301; Yūnīnī, 3/192–3; Nu‘aymī, 1/455–6.

¹² An example was the 'Aṣrūniyya. The grandson of the first lecturer was thought incapable of the post because of his lack of knowledge of fiqh: Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 18.

¹³ For an extreme example see one of the Banū Qalānīs who according to Ibn Kathīr held more posts than anyone ever had: Ibn Kathīr, 14/154; Nu‘aymī, 198–9. For other examples see Ibn Kathīr, 13/322; Jazarī, BN MS, 57.

¹⁴ See for example the Shāmiyya al-Barrāniyya, Nu‘aymī, 1/279.

¹⁵ For examples of posts passed on to at least three people within a lineage see Nu‘aymī, 1/ 54, 55; 115–19, 158–66, 178–82, 193–200, 216–25, 236–40, 253–65, 277–300, 326–7, 373–82, 382–98, 398–406, 431–4, 455–6, 508–18, 572–6, 594–9; 2/30–41, 64–79, 79–86, 86–8.

¹⁶ For a definition of the *nuzūl* see Qalqashandī, 12/353; for examples of it see Nu‘aymī, 1/224, 229. The term also applied to passing on military commands (*imra*) from father to son: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 12/364; Ibn al-Ṣuqāṭ, 100–1.

¹⁷ They also appointed deputies to their positions until their sons were capable of assuming them, much like the institution of the *atabek*: Yūnīnī, 2/143.

¹⁸ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/227; 22/300; Ibn Kathīr, 13/101.

ṣabs. The Banū Subkī, one of the important scholarly lineages in the city, and Ibn al-Khaṭīb arranged a swap of manṣabs that both parties found convenient. One of the Banū Subkī took Ibn al-Khaṭīb's manṣabs in Cairo, and Ibn al-Khaṭīb in turn took a manṣab vacated by another of the Banū Subkī in Damascus.¹⁹ Lecturers could pass on their posts to others most easily at the height of their prestige, which was one reason why shaykhs passed on their posts to their sons while their sons were still of a young age.²⁰

The nuzūl was not recognized in law, but depended on the prestige of the lecturer, on the expectation more generally that sons should inherit their fathers' positions, and on the lecturer's ability to enlist powerful supporters, such as the caliph or the sultān.²¹ It also depended on external factors, such as the status of the candidate, the intensity of competition over manṣabs at the time, and the interest of the sultān. Because it depended on all of these other factors, attempts by manṣab-holders to "pass on" their manṣabs often failed.²² Most manṣab-holders conceded that the nuzūl was more of a social hope than a right. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī could do no more than wish for "just three things: that my son here take up my posts, that I see my [dead] son Aḥmad in a dream, and that I die in Cairo."²³

Powerful men rewarded their clients and scoured their detractors with manṣabs. The sultān, governors, wazīrs, and amīrs deposed shaykhs from their manṣabs and appointed others, and made appointments to vacant manṣabs.²⁴ At least one amīr intervened on behalf of the scholarly descendant of another amīr, though it was rare in Damascus for descendants of amīrs to become lecturers.²⁵ Members of ruling households – including sultāns – recognized few impediments to making appointments themselves, though they never had the legal or administrative capacity that authors such as Qalqa-shandī argued for.

Throughout the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods, sultāns increasingly made

¹⁹ Nu‘aymī, 1/240.

²⁰ See Ibn Kathīr, 14/184 for an example of a seventeen-year-old chief qādī who also delivered a lecture at a madrasa. Among many other examples of the passing on of posts are Ibn Kathīr, 13/327, 14/128; Nu‘aymī, 1/238. ²¹ Nu‘aymī, 1/380; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/522.

²² See Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/174 for the example of Dhahabī's attempt to "pass on" the dār al-ḥadīth al-Zāhiriyā to Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī. After it failed ("lam yamdi'n-nuzūl"), Subkī's father told him: "I know that you are best suited (mustaḥiq), but there are others older than you who are more appropriate (awlā) to it." Later, Dhahabī on his deathbed again swore to pass on the manṣab to Subkī, but again Subkī's youth prevented him from taking it. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 123–6, for how a "deviation from the rule might engender a dispute."

²³ Later he went to the tomb of Shaykh Ḥamād outside the Bāb al-Ṣaghīr and sought the shaykh's intercession – "I have three sons, one of whom has gone to God, another is in the Hijāz and I know nothing of him, and the third is here. I want him to take my posts": Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/175. For another shaykh who sought in dreams confirmation that his son would take his manṣabs see Jazārī, BN MS, 8a.

²⁴ For an appointment made by a wazīr see Ibn Kathīr, 13/114; for appointments by the governor Tankiz see Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 144b. ²⁵ For one rare example see Ibn Kathīr, 13/325, 326.

appointments and by the eighth century made many appointments at a time.²⁶ Sultāns also dismissed lecturers for a variety of reasons. Lecturers lost their mansabs for criticizing powerful men, for teaching sciences out of favor, for finding themselves on the wrong side in factional disputes, and to make way for favorites. The rational sciences (*al-`ulūm al-`aqliyya*) flourished in the reign of al-Mu`azzam Isa, and were banned by al-Malik al-Ashraf. Each hired and fired shaykhs who followed one or the other.²⁷ Al-Mu`azzam dismissed one lecturer who criticized his wine-drinking, and another for refusing to issue a fatwā deeming the practice legal.²⁸ Shaykhs did not have to be formally deposed by rulers to abandon their posts. Sulamī prudently left the city and his mansabs after the sultān became angry at his attempt to remove innovations from the sermon.²⁹

Holders of mansabs also rose and fell with the leaders of their factions. When fitna broke out (*burūq al-fitna*), or the leader of a faction was deposed, one consequence was a reshuffle of mansabs. When the Sultān Baybars al-Jāshnikīr's shaykh al-Manbijī was at the height of his power he dismissed at least one associate of his enemy Ibn Taymiyya from a mansab.³⁰ Following the death of Baybars al-Jāshnikīr there was much rivalry (*asābiyya*) over mansabs in Damascus. The supporters of Manbijī lost many of their mansabs in Cairo and Damascus, while shaykhs who either opposed Baybars al-Jāshnikīr or supported Qalawūn against him were rewarded with mansabs of their own.³¹ This year was remembered as “the year of the reapportionment of the *wazifas*” (*sanna qisma al-wazā`if*), of which there was another in 669/1270–1.³²

Although it appears that rulers used mansabs as a way of gaining control of the city, the *a`yān* often enlisted powerful men in their rivalries against one another. Throughout the period scholarly factions and lineages enlisted ruling groups in their struggles over mansabs. Scholars arrived from Cairo with appointments to mansabs from the sultān in hand.³³ In Damascus they

²⁶ See Jazārī, Köp. MS, 453, 590; Jazārī, BN MS, 304; Ibn Kathīr, 13/339 for examples. By Qalqashandi's time, if the ever-problematic *Subh al-`ashā* is to be credited, most major appointments were made by decree of the sultān, while the lesser mansabs were granted by the governor, but throughout most of the period in question at least appointments were not entirely in the gift of the sultān: Qalqashandi, 12/6, 357; Gaufreoy-Demombynes, *La Syrie*, 166.

²⁷ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 137; Nu`aymī, 1/393; 2/292; Ibn al-`Imād, *Shadharāt*, 5/144; Ibn Kathīr, 13/124, 140–1, 148; Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 119; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir`āt*, 8/691.

²⁸ Ibn Kathīr, 13/101, 136; Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 103, 104.

²⁹ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 5/80–1. ³⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 14/50.

³¹ Ibn Kathīr, 14/49, 57–9, 61, 65. For other examples of lecturers losing mansabs due to their alignments in factional competition see Ibn Kathīr, 13/330; 14/56, 180.

³² Nu`aymī, 1/190; see also the reshuffle of mansabs after the fitna of 693/1293–4 recounted by Jazārī, BN MS, 235–6, and the reshuffle of 696/1296–7 in Jazārī, BN MS, 339–408.

³³ When Ibn al-Zamlakānī was appointed qādī of Aleppo, his successor arrived in Damascus with an appointment in hand: Jazārī, Köp. MS, 501. Ibn Jamā`a lost two madrasas in Damascus because he was resident in Egypt, but he got a decree from the sultān through Manbijī's intercession, and regained them for a time: Ibn Kathīr, 14/58. A scholar won a mansab after securing an audience with the sultān in Cairo: Nu`aymī, 1/200.

ambushed the sultān with requests for mansabs when he visited the city, hoping that “the glance of the sultān might fall upon them.”³⁴ Civilians enlisted sultāns, caliphs, wazirs, and amīrs to depose holders of mansabs in favor of others, or to defend a client’s hold on one, in a variety of ways. Payoffs and gifts were a common means of acquiring a mansab.³⁵ Another tactic was to accuse a mansab-holder of vice, immorality, impiety, or unbelief.³⁶ The most common strategy for gaining a mansab was to seek the intercession (*shifā'a*) of a powerful person, in the same manner that warriors rose through the intercession of other powerful people.³⁷ Amīrs, sultāns, governors, other civilians, and rulers from elsewhere found themselves enlisted to intervene on behalf of competitors for mansabs.³⁸ As power was held by men at the top of temporary networks, competitors for mansabs sought to muster as many powerful supporters as they could. Because the networks these people headed overlapped, cooperated, and competed with one another in different fields, a conflict over a mansab could bring in several powerful people who worked out their relationships to one another gingerly.

This accounts in part for the impression of disorder in competition over mansabs. Even the sultān’s candidates could lose out. In 702/1302–3 a struggle erupted over the mansabs of the recently deceased Zayn al-Dīn al-Fāriqī. The governor made a number of appointments to his posts, one on the advice of Ibn Taymiyya. Soon thereafter Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibn al-Wakīl arrived in the city on the post (*barīd*) from Cairo, bearing appointments to those mansabs from the sultān, posts which he added to others he already held in the city. This set off a struggle over the mansabs that the sultān’s candidate eventually lost.³⁹ Similarly, Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Qaramī turned up in the city in 725/1325 bearing appointments from the sultān to two large madrasas. Both appointments were abrogated after the chief qādī of his madhhab held an audience concerning the

³⁴ Jazārī, BN MS, 351, 393. An example was the scholar who waited until al-Ādil Kitbugha made a visitation to the Prophet’s relics at a shrine outside the city to approach him, and obtained a mansab for his deftness: Nu‘aymī, 1/281.

³⁵ See Nu‘aymī, 1/377 for an amīr discovered accepting payoffs from both sides in a competition over a mansab. Periodic attempts were made to forbid the sale of mansabs, such as Qalāwūn’s order (made at the instigation of Ibn Taymiyya) that no one be appointed to office by virtue of a payoff, but there is no evidence that they succeeded: Ibn Kathīr, 14/66. See also Nu‘aymī, 1/255 for another example. See Ṣafādī, *al-Wājīt*, 18/137 for the story of a lecturer appointed to the Niẓāmiyya in Baghdad who “paid enough to build another Niẓāmiyya.” Tankīz was praised for never accepting a payoff for any of the offices he controlled: Ṣafādī, *A'yān*, 144b.

³⁶ See Nu‘aymī, 1/193, 304; Ibn Kathīr, 14/59 for accusations of immorality and vice in a dispute over a post; see Ṣafādī, *al-Wājīt*, 21/346; Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 119; see Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-huffāz* (Hyderabad, 1955–8), 4/60–1 and Ibn Khallikān, 2/455–6 for accusations against Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī of unbelief in fitnas over mansabs that twice lost him mansabs and once almost resulted in his execution.

³⁷ For examples of *shifā'a* with respect to amīrs see Ibn al-Šuqā'ī, 25; Ibn al-Ādīm, *Zubda*, 160–1.

³⁸ Among the many examples that could be cited are the *shifā'a* of the governor of Aleppo on behalf of a lecturer in Damascus: Nu‘aymī, 1/238, 282, 304; of amīrs: Nu‘aymī, 1/192–5, 304, 377; Ibn Kathīr, 13/325, 326; the *shifā'a* of wazirs and bureaucrats: Nu‘aymī, 1/186; of governors of the city: Nu‘aymī, 1/377. ³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, 14/28; Nu‘aymī, 1/304–5.

mansab.⁴⁰ Even when the a‘yān did not challenge a sultān’s appointments directly, they had indirect ways of showing opposition. In 696/1296–7 Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Sharīshī arrived in Damascus with appointments from the sultān in hand. The qādīs of the city, fearful of the mansab-holder Jamāl al-Dīn deposed, steered clear of the inaugural lecture.⁴¹ Finally, even when a mansab in a madrasa supported a particular office, appointment to the office did not mean that the holder of the mansab was automatically dismissed, even though this was often enough the case. When a new chief qādī was appointed, dismissing the holders of mansabs associated with the qādīship could prove difficult, so new qādīs could wait for the deaths of their current holders.⁴² As these examples illustrate, mansabs were one element among several in the everlasting conflicts and negotiations of the major households and networks of the city. Attempts by jurists or proponents of the sultān’s power to establish the legal capacity of one party or another to make appointments obscure how mansabs were prizes of political and social struggles. They brought into play money, influence, factional alliance, and the power to intimidate, in addition to such formal legal capacity or administrative procedure as may have existed.⁴³

We can observe how local households brought rulers into their struggles with one another, and how outside conquerors exploited local rivalries, in the Mongol seizure of Damascus in 658/1260. Several of the leading ‘ulamā’ of the city solicited the major mansabs of Syria from the Mongol ruler Hulegu. Two who benefited were the chief qādīs Ibn al-Zakī and ‘Umar al-Tiflīsī.⁴⁴ They obtained many of the major mansabs in Syria, including a large number of madrasas, which they distributed among their families and protégés. The Mongol governor stepped easily into the ceremonial role of the Ayyūbid sultān, and a number of the a‘yān were more than happy to cast him in it. At the investiture ceremony at the Qubba al-Naṣr in the Umayyad Mosque, the Mongol governor appeared with his wife for the reading of the appointments. Ibn al-Zakī himself appeared in great state for the ceremony. The sources treated the dealings of shaykhs with Mongols as expected events. When the Mongols decamped, Ibn al-Zakī and ‘Umar al-Tiflīsī were not treated as traitors or collaborators; on the contrary, both judged their chances of survival optimistically enough to make large payoffs to retain their mansabs. In time, however, they lost them, and Ibn al-Zakī withdrew to Cairo.

Najm al-Dīn Ibn Sanī al-Dawla also benefited from the Mongol invasion,

⁴⁰ Nu‘aymī, 1/119; for an example from 694/1294–5 of appointments from Cairo that were abrogated see Jazārī, BN MS, 305.

⁴¹ Ibn Taymiyya went to his house and heard his lecture there, “seeking its baraka”: Jazārī, BN MS, 408. ⁴² See Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 23.

⁴³ For an example of how such evidence contradicts Qalqashandī’s definitions of the formal capacities of the sultān and the governor to make appointments see Qalqashandī, 12/6–7.

⁴⁴ Yūnīnī, 1/357–8, 460; 2/13, 14, 124; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 204–6, 214; Nu‘aymī, 1/190; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 5/130–1.

and we can profit from his struggles over the next twenty years to learn something about the nature of a 'yān competition.⁴⁵ His father, the chief qādī Șadr al-Dīn Ibn Sanī al-Dawla, had approached Hulegu with Ibn al-Zakī, but failed to obtain anything from him, and died soon afterwards. Najm al-Dīn took many of his father's mansabs, and acquired the Amīniyya by his own efforts. Like the others after the Mongol defeat, he tried to hold on to his mansabs by making large payoffs. However, Shams al-Dīn Ibn Khallikān arrived from Egypt with an appointment from the sultān to Najm al-Dīn's mansabs as well as those his father had held. Ibn Sanī al-Dawla had to give them up. The spectacle gave rise to a poem much recited and long remembered:

The sun's light struck the star and incinerated him,⁴⁶
and he sunk into the nether-regions and drowned.
The nights mourned him who was their sun; and fate, long-lived, revealed to him what
had been obscure.
Lying hope promised that after adversity he would not know loss,
So he was prodigal with his money that his dominance (riyāsa) might endure.
He tore the tissue of law and piety, as if he needed neither,
And an arrow from the West [i.e. Ibn Khallikān, arriving from Egypt]
struck him; may its sender [i.e. the sultān] be exalted!⁴⁷

This was the opening bout of a rivalry that continued until their deaths in 680–1/1281–2. Ibn Khallikān went on to a brilliant career, becoming in time chief qādī, and achieving fame as a historian, judge, and administrator. Ibn Sanī al-Dawla also did well, regaining in time the Amīniyya and also becoming a chief qādī. In 679/1280–1 the conflict between Sultān Qalāwūn and Sungur al-Ashqar, a governor of the city who declared himself an independent sultān, caught the two rivals on opposite sides. While Sungur was at the height of his power, he gave Ibn Khallikān Ibn Sanī al-Dawla's mansab at the Amīniyya as well as his position as chief qādī. As for Ibn Sanī al-Dawla, he was borne off to the muşādara in Cairo. Some time later, Qalāwūn having subdued Sungur, Ibn Sanī al-Dawla quashed Ibn Khallikān, regained the chief qādīship, and repossessed his mansab at the Amīniyya. Ibn Khallikān went off to imprisonment at the khanqāh al-Najībiyya; released, he was ordered to move his things out of the Ādiliyya to make way for Ibn Sanī al-Dawla. At the last moment a communication from the sultān arrived reprieving him, re-appointing him qādī (meaning that he could continue to reside in the Ādiliyya) and giving him a robe of honor, which he wore during the Friday prayer.⁴⁸ The unexpected

⁴⁵ For his rivalry with Ibn Khallikān see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 214–15; Yūnīnī, 1/460; Ibn Kathīr, 13/290.

⁴⁶ These are puns on their honorifics, Shams al-Dīn, “the sun of religion” and Najm al-Dīn, “the star of religion.” ⁴⁷ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 125, 275.

⁴⁸ For the events of 679/1280–1 see Ibn Kathīr, 13/291; Yūnīnī 4/37–9, 42, 43; Ibn Shākir, 21/242–6; Ibn al-Šuqā'ī, 5, 6.

reversal gave birth to another poem: “The star has faded after its return, and morning has dawned; and the sun has risen after it set.”⁴⁹ This was a long-standing but still typical example of a conflict over mansabs that brought in rulers, other powerful men, and factions.

Where madrasas and dār al-ḥadīths were founded as a means of attaching the prestige of ‘ilm and the protection of waqf to the personal and political strategies of powerful households, their effect was to transform the nature of competition among the a‘yān. What appears to be a system corrupted by money, office-mongering, and factional politics was in fact no “system” at all, much less a corrupted one. It was rather an arena of fitna in which various elites deployed the same competitive practices by which other social and political prizes were contested. Issues such as whether mansabs were inheritable, whether and under what circumstances the sultān or qādī or nāzīr might make appointments, how the “process” was corrupted by power or money, what the “mechanisms” for making appointments were, all mistake the nature of social competition in the city. Struggles over mansabs were much like struggles for all the monetized honors of the city. This is why such struggles were so often referred to as fitna. Amīrs and scholars imagined their rivalries in the same language and images, and advanced themselves by many of the same social and political tactics. Even the jurists were never able to elaborate a concept of the “right” to a mansab, or the “capacity” to appoint others to one; all they could do was uphold suitability (istihqāq), and even here they often failed.

The uses of knowledge: conflicts external and internal

When Damascenes invested their painfully acquired knowledge to succeed in the world they experienced conflicts both internal and external. Many experienced a contradiction when they expended social capital acquired through learning and ascetic piety to purchase an elite status and style of life. Some among the civilian elite adopted a style not very different from that of wealthy and powerful amīrs. They wore luxurious clothing, rode about on caparisoned donkeys, kept slaves, and traveled about in state accompanied by large retinues.⁵⁰ Men at the top of scholarly and military networks had similar styles of self-glorification. The chief qādī had slaves (*ghilmān*) as one of the perquisites of office, traveled in state, and rode riding animals in the city like a high-ranking amīr.⁵¹ When Ibn Jamā‘a became qādī al-quḍā, he entered

⁴⁹ Yūnīnī, 4/143.

⁵⁰ See for example the scholar who became wealthy in the service of Saladin and was said to keep twenty concubines, each worth a thousand dinars, and kept a table that rivaled those of princes: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 34–5; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘at*, 8/515. See also Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 5/28; Yūnīnī, 1/356.

⁵¹ Jazārī, BN MS, 240–1, for a chief qādī who entered the city in state like a prince (“*dakhala fi mawqab hā’il ka-dukhūl al-mulūk*”); Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘at*, 8/590; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/453.

Damascus “in great state, like the entrance of princes.” Following his procession to the ʿĀdiliyya madrasa, he sat in the iwan and listened to panegyric poems written about him recited by the city’s poets.⁵²

Only a small number of the aṣyān, those most closely integrated into ruling groups, asserted themselves in this manner. A more significant consequence of the proliferation of manṣabs was the support of a larger group of aṣyān who competed for these, and whose use of knowledge for worldly purposes was often ambiguous. Men who struggled for manṣabs took much of their prestige from others who shunned them. Some shaykhs refused manṣabs, and the sources praised them for living quietly and benefiting students in their study-circles.⁵³ As others benefited from the waqfs of madrasas, they also admitted that they were polluted by them.

One of the paradoxes of the exercise of power in the city was that ruling elites tried to make use of the prestige of men who would have nothing to do with them. Shaykhs who resided in relatively “clean” madrasas shunned appointments to the major manṣabs (*manāṣib al-kibār*), such as the great madrasas and judgeships. Some writers praised the manliness (*murū'a*) or the ascetic resolve of men who refused manṣabs.⁵⁴ Ibn ʿAsākir, to take one example, refused an appointment from the Ayyūbid sultān al-Ādil and was obliged to flee town to escape his anger. Al-Ādil afterwards was urged to forget what might have been an insult coming from someone else: “You should rather thank God that there is someone in your domain pious enough to refuse your appointments.”⁵⁵ Others refused any appointments whatsoever. Those fastidious about accepting manṣabs saw them as a kind of pollution. A pious shaykh who made his living copying and gilding books “was not polluted by any appointment to office, nor by any appointment to any of the madrasas or notary-ships.”⁵⁶

These conflicts and tensions came out in poetry. A line of verse quoted by Subkī illustrates the cliché that the “true” manṣab of the learned man had nothing to do with the manṣabs of the madrasas and other foundations: “The perfection of the young man is in ‘ilm not in manṣabs; and the rank of the learned is the most splendid of all ranks.”⁵⁷ A larger poem, this one attributed

⁵² Jazārī, BN MS, 240–1.

⁵³ For one example see Nuṣaymī, 1/239.

⁵⁴ For a refusal to accept a post as qādī seen as *murū'a* see Ibn Kathīr, 14/111; another refusal of appointment to the *manāṣib al-kibār* see Ibn Kathīr, 14/146. For refusal of manṣabs as ascetic renunciation see Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/182: “wa-zahida fi'l-manāṣib wa-a'rāda 'anhā i'rāḍan kulliyān.” Also Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 22; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 368.

⁵⁵ Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 62; Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/235; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 138.

⁵⁶ Ibn Kathīr, 14/43, 109: “Lam yatađannas bi-shay' mina'l-wilāyat, wa-lā tadannasa bi-shay' min ważā'i'l-madāris wa-lā'sh-shahādāt.”

⁵⁷ “Kamālu'l-fatiyyi b'il-'ilmī lā b'il-manāṣibi wa-rutbatu ahli'l-'ilmī asnā'l-marātib”: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/161, 163; Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 33, 34, and 35, where the line appears in another poem. See *ibid.*, 14 for reaching the “dharwa manṣabī,” the “acme of his manṣab,” for reforming the chief qādīship of the city.

to Ibn Daqīq al-Īd, condemned the exploitation of ‘ilm in the struggle for mansabs:

The mansab-holders (*ahl al-manāṣib*) belong to this world and its high positions; while the people of virtue (*ahl al-faḍā’iḥ*) are abased among them.

They humiliate us because we are not of their breed (*jīns*); they reckon us beasts, to be ignored.

What [little] they have of charity, it pains us to see; and what they have of ambition, gives us anxiety.

They have their happiness from ignorance and sumptuous wealth; while we have our exhaustion from ‘ilm and privation.

This poem inspired a ribald response that inverted its language to defend the association of learning with prestige and power:

What are mansabs, or the things of the world, or high positions, to one who has acquired the ‘ilm that you possess not?

No doubt we have superior ability – that is what they saw – yet we reckon them inadequate; they are nothing to us.

They are but beasts, and we humans; our intelligence leads them where we wish, while they are but livestock.

They have nothing but their vapidity to distinguish themselves from us – because their opinions are a nullity.

Ours is the happiness of ‘ilm and privation; and theirs is the stigma of ignorance and shame.⁵⁸

Similar conflicts came out in clothing. A fairly small number of the a‘yān adopted the clothing styles of amīrs, as amīrs occasionally donned scholarly garb. A larger number flaunted styles that exaggerated the marks of learned status, especially large turbans and wide sleeves, which became larger and wider throughout the period.⁵⁹ The turban was the mark of the learned Muslim male, and the learned as a group called themselves “wearers of the turban” (*muta‘ammamīn*) and “people of the turban” (*ahl al-‘imāma*). The *ṭaylasān* or *ṭarḥa* (a covering over the turban which ran down the back slightly) was awarded to distinguished visitors, as well as to holders of the mansabs such as qādis, the keeper of the treasury (*wakīl bayt al-māl*), the supervisor of waqfs (*nāżir al-awqāf*), and market inspectors (*muhtasibs*), for whom it functioned as a marker of authority.⁶⁰ It was also worn by some of the learned

⁵⁸ Subki, *Tabaqāt*, 6/6. One irony of this exchange was the execution in Egypt in 701/1301–2 of the author of the second poem for unbelief: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/152–3; Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 55a–56b.

⁵⁹ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Rihla*, 1/383; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 643; Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 182–3.

⁶⁰ The *ṭaylasān* was either similar to or identical with the *ṭarḥa*: see Lane, s.v. TRH; R. Dozy, *Dictionnaire des vêtements arabes* (Leiden, 1881), 254, 262. Qalqashandī, 4/42 had it that the *ṭarḥa* was worn by the qādī al-quḍā of the Ḥanafīs and the Shāfi‘īs. See Nu‘aymī, 1/270, Jazārī, BN MS, 473 for the use of the *ṭaylasān*/*ṭarḥa* to mark holders of the waqfs. For the *ṭaylasān*/*ṭarḥa* as a mark of authority, see for example the anecdote that had a lamp-carrier falsely identify someone as a qādī because of the *ṭaylasān* the latter was wearing. Also, see the new

as a marker of status, and a lecturer could wear it or be awarded it.⁶¹ When the holder of a manṣab was humiliated, the ṭaylasān was publicly “thrown” from his head.⁶²

As was the case with the manṣabs, where the “true” manṣab of the learned man was compared to worldly manṣabs, writers claimed that the “true” robe of honor of the learned was humble dress. Yūnīnī recorded a panegyric to a shaykh who criticized these styles: “O learned one, who stands as a guardian of religion, and to whom our wearing of the ṭaylasān is a heretical innovation (*biḍ'a*).”⁶³ Even the intimates of learned men criticized them when they flaunted ostentatious dress. The daughter of Abū ‘Umar Ibn Qudāma, famous for her learning and piety, criticized her brother Shams al-Dīn for his “worldly” fabrics.⁶⁴ Men who refused manṣabs did so by refusing the robe of honor whose delivery announced the appointment.⁶⁵ Ibn al-Ḥājj sided himself with those who condemned the learned fashions of the age. He contrasted his age’s obsession with fashion with the simplicity of the Prophet’s companions: “God made pious fear (*khashya*) the robe of honor of the learned, but some have made the width, quality, and smoothness of their sleeves and robes their robes of honor.”⁶⁶ Ibn al-Ḥājj also scorned the confusion of style with substance:

Students should wear the correct clothes for audiences in which knowledge is transmitted (*majlis al-ilm*). These days students wear distinctive clothing as though it were a requirement, and as though one may not attend a lecture without such clothing. If a student attends a lecture wearing such clothing he is [considered] ignominious, insulting to a place of knowledge . . . All this comes from self-love. Dressing to distinguish oneself from one’s contemporaries and colleagues is contrary to the sunna. One who dresses in such a manner is said to be a jurist (*faqīh*), so [people] distinguish [themselves] from the common people in that manner. [They] could not attain such a rank otherwise except after a long period of time, when [they] would attain a level of distinction (*faḍila*) that would distinguish [them] from the common people. Only by [their] dress do [they] rise above them and associate [themselves] with the ‘ulamā'. Thus is learning (*fiqh*) acquired by fashion and not by study (*dars*).⁶⁷

Ibn al-Ḥājj not only objected to pretentiousness in dress, he also worried that the clothing of the learned would be taken as a marker of competence:

Wearing the correct style can be misleading to the masses, because someone who is ignorant or nearly so can be sought out for legal advice by the common people . . . what

market inspector (*muhtasib*), who was paraded around the city in his ṭaylasān and robe of honor: Ibn Kathīr, 14/43. For al-Malik al-Kāmil’s giving the ṭaylasān as an honor to the visiting shaykh ash-shuyūkh from Baghdaḍ, see Ibn Shakīr, Vat. Ar. MS, 28.

⁶¹ See Nu‘aymī, 1/558 for the qāḍī who wore the ḥarṭa when he gave the dars at the ‘Izziyya al-Hanafīya madrasa. See also the ṭaylasān and the green robe of honor given to Ibn al-Qalāniṣī when he was appointed to the tadrīs of the Aminiyya: Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 250.

⁶² Ibn Kathīr, 13/37; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 57.

⁶³ “Ayyuhā l-‘ālimu lladhi qāma li d-dīnī ḥārisan w'alladhi mubda‘atuhu ‘lbisatunā t-ṭaylasān”: Yūnīnī, 2/394. ⁶⁴ Safadī, *al-Wāfi*, 11/304. ⁶⁵ Ibn Kathīr, 14/47.

⁶⁶ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1/140. ⁶⁷ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1/136–7.

he wears prevents him from admitting that he does not know because he would be associating himself with ignorance. He might deliver a *fatwā* based on his personal opinion (*rā'i*) or on the principle of equity (*maṣlaḥa*).⁶⁸ He makes analogies with similar cases imagining that they are similar – and correct legal judgment (*al-hukm*) is not reached in this manner. He will lead others into error. This corruption occurs because of contradicting the sunna with respect to clothing.⁶⁹

However, other members of the elite defended their characteristic clothing styles. When he was appointed chief *qādī*, for example, Ibn Jamā'a ordered that the other *qādīs* continue to wear the *ṭarḥa*.⁷⁰ Another shaykh found sanction for wearing luxurious clothing in a dream. Meeting a dead shaykh who was wearing luxurious clothing, he asked what God had done with him, and was told that he was forgiven.⁷¹

Status collided with gender in clothing. When elite women took to wearing the large turban, the governor of the city in 690/1291 forbade them to wear it.⁷² Similarly, when men wore the *ṭaylasān* and wide and long sleeves they skirted dangerously close to gender boundaries. Ibn al-Hājj used any argument he could to criticize the width of sleeves and the wearing of the *ṭaylasān*, including the allegation that wearers of *ṭaylasāns* were occasionally hanged by them.⁷³ Critical in general of all emblems of superiority, he made use of gender boundaries to make a point about status. Condemning the *ṭaylasān* as a heretical innovation (*bid'a*), he wrote that those who wore it “can be taken from the side for women who fear to show their faces to men. Some of them even put a needle in their *ṭaylasāns*, pinning them to their turbans so that the wind does not carry them away, just as a woman does with her veil to keep her face from being exposed to those outside her family. Men should not resemble women.”⁷⁴ Ibn al-Hājj also condemned the wearing of long hems and sleeves. He could find little in his own time to compare to the rough austerity of the Caliph 'Umar, who upon discovering that the sleeves of his robe were too long, cut them between two rocks and left the threads dangling.⁷⁵ Women, he wrote, could wear their hems long because of the demands of modesty, but there was no need for it in the case of men.⁷⁶

Situated between those who sprinted to the Mongols at the first whiff of a manṣab, and those who lived eremitically, between those who flaunted their status and those who rejected all emblems of it, most of the *a'yān* occupied a middle ground. The sources often described the moral world of the scholar in absolutes, and assigned people to one category or another easily. But in fact the evidence suggests that many people were torn inwardly. Ibn al-Hājj captured nicely the urbane self-loathing that some experienced when they cashed in their distinction for manṣabs: “We deprecate the things of this world

⁶⁸ Mālikīs such as Ibn al-Hājj accepted neither *rā'i* nor *maṣlaḥa* as jurisprudential principles.

⁶⁹ Ibn al-Hājj, 1/136–7. ⁷⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 13/322. ⁷¹ Ibn Rajab, 2/108.

⁷² Jazārī, BN MS, 59–60; Ibn Kathīr, 13/322. Ibn Taymiyya, *Mukhtaṣar al-fatāwā al-miṣriyya*, 318–23 wrote a *fatwā* condemning this practice.

⁷³ Ibn al-Hājj, 1/139. ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1/139. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1/133. ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1/130.

with our tongues and pull them to us with our hands and feet.”⁷⁷ Ibn Jamā‘a, a jurist who advised students against seeking knowledge for worldly ends, such as gaining large numbers of students, fame, manṣabs, or money, was himself one of the most worldly of the learned, and held many major manṣabs in both Egypt and Syria.⁷⁸ Even men with the greatest success in the world learned to speak of it – or to be heard speaking of it – with disdain. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, a man with great success in the struggle for manṣabs, and whose efforts on behalf of his sons are uniquely well documented, “saw the world as nothing but dispersed dust (*habban manshūran*), and he knew not how to gain a [single] dirham.”⁷⁹

Ibn al-Ḥājj, though a Cairene, expressed resentments towards the appropriation of learning for worldly ends that were common in Damascus. He was a Mālikī, and as Mālikīs rejected waqf as practiced by the other schools, part of his criticism at what he encountered in Egypt and Syria can be understood as the position of his legal school on foundations. But as he furnished the most detailed expression of this attitude his opinions are worth some consideration. Expressing his disdain for the acquisition of knowledge as a social investment, he called up a germane ḥadīth: “You have learned ‘ilm in order to be called ‘ālim.” He regretted the perversion of knowledge into manṣab-seeking: “People learn ‘ilm, then investigate it, then want manṣabs and leadership (*riyāsāt*); [they] delight in ostentatious display (*maḥabba aẓ-ẓuhūr w’ar-raf‘a*), and [are] avid for high standing with rulers, amīrs, the ‘ulamā’, and the common people (*awāmm*); frequenting their doors is an incurable disease.” As in the poem quoted above, he contrasted the struggle for manṣabs with the “true” manṣab of the learned man: “By frequenting those in power, they deprecate their great manṣab with respect to the shari‘a (*al-mansab ash-shari‘i l-‘azīm*).”

According to Ibn al-Ḥājj, competition for manṣabs caused the learned to ignore their true pastoral function: “The occupation of the ‘ulamā’ is *ri‘āyya* (pastoral guidance) and the occupation of the stupid is *riwāya* (narration). He whose heart God has enlightened has reached a high rank (*rutba ‘uliyā’*), and those whose hearts God has not enlightened are either devils or thieves.”

The idea that the manṣabs interfered with rather than facilitated the acquisition of ‘ilm did not divide the a‘yān into those who sought out manṣabs and those who did not; rather it created an interior divide within many people that was never bridged. A typology of learned people might be constructed that would place the lone ascetic copyist or ḥadīth scholar on one end and on the other a chief qādī with the manṣabs of many household waqfs, a retinue including mamlūks and caparisoned donkeys, and a household noted for the number of its slave girls. As with all such charts, however, many a‘yān would have been able to imagine themselves at most points. The author of the poem

⁷⁷ This and the following section are taken from Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1/14–20.

⁷⁸ See for example his advice in *Tadhkira al-sāmi‘*, 12–13, 19.

⁷⁹ Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 3.

lamenting the abasement of the “people of virtue” at the hands of the “people of mansabs” himself had mansabs in a number of madrasas. Fathers also found it difficult to explain to their sons the compromises needed to survive in the world. One of the Banū Subkī hoped to spare his son a youth’s disdain of hypocrisy by explaining how he lobbied on his behalf for the chief qādīship of the city. “Never, never,” he warned, “seek the qādīship with your heart in addition to your acts.”⁸⁰ A paradox often remarked was that social power came to those who refused it most. Ilm had a high exchange value in social relations, one which could be cashed in easily. The resentments and interior conflicts that this set off ran through the social life of the period.

Conclusion

Scholars have studied madrasas primarily as institutions of education, yet the complex interrelations among household waqfs, the cultivation of knowledge, and the social strategies of elites has been an unresolved problem. Madrasas together with other waqfs were both objects and arenas of fitna. They had no autonomous leadership or administration, nor were they permanent and impersonal instruments of outside groups. Rather, power held by others – the sultān, governor, households of amīrs, qādīs, lecturers, scholarly factions, and lineages – intersected at madrasas, as these groups struggled to control revenue sources and the uses to which they could be put. Juristic literature mandated that appointments to madrasas were to follow the prescriptions of waqf. Administrative literature gave the sultān or the governor the authority to make appointments and oversee the affairs of the madrasas more generally. But these sources have to be understood in terms of the social and political strategies they were intended to advance. As the chronicles and biographical dictionaries make abundantly clear, the formal legal or administrative “capacity” of qādīs, jurists, and even the sultān was just one element in wider struggles to control waqfs.

The effect of the foundation of large numbers of madrasas in the city was less to change the nature of education than to redirect the nature of social competition. Mansabs became prizes of social competition among the a‘yān much as iqṭā‘s were objects of competitive struggle among amīrs. Terms such as “eligibility,” “ineligibility,” “appointment,” “stipend,” “dismissal,” and “seizure of a post,” among many others, were not restricted to “education,” but referred to a more universal set of competitive practices, both “educational” and “military,” “social” and “political.”

When young Damascenes wanted to become learned shaykhs they imitated their exemplars. If we can speak of an object of “education” at all it was a quality of exemplarity that was desired, rather than any formal qualification or affiliation. In Damascus social honor was not enshrined in titles of nobility

⁸⁰ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/175.

or certificates of educational competence. The object of education was not a credential with a fixed or expected value. What appear as credentials were tokens not only of an individual's acquisition of the texts carried by his shaykh, but of the whole complex of manners, moral conduct, deportment, and scripted forms of self-presentation that in sum made up the notion of *adab*. How the *a'yān* acquired this symbolic capital, and the uses they made of it, are the subjects of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 4

Social and cultural capital

Nothing takes longer to acquire than the surface polish which is called good manners.
Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (Paris, 1856)

They are more proud of the title Cartesian and of the capacity to defend his principles than of their noble birth and blood.

Giovanni Marana, *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (Paris, 1684)

This chapter examines how the *a'yān*, through cultivation of *'ilm*, inculcated in their young a talent or knack for acquiring social and cultural capital. It will argue that the *a'yān* acquired their critical loyalties and social distinction by making social use of cultural practices associated with *'ilm*. It will argue further that where in other societies many of these practices are specialized in formal domains such as “higher education” and “book production,” in medieval Damascus they are better studied as a single group of ritual, mimetic, and performative practices.

Young people and their shaykhs

As with much else in the cultural history of Islamic societies, the association of learning with loyalty was summed up in a quotation attributed to 'Ali Ibn Abī Ṭālib: “I am the slave of whoever who teaches me one letter of the alphabet. If he wishes he may sell me; if he so desires he may set me free; and if he cares to he may make use of me as a slave.”¹ In quoting this sentiment, Zarnūjī was typical of his contemporaries. The *a'yān* of Damascus constructed their most intimate and socially critical social bonds through the cultivation of *'ilm*. Bonds of dependence and loyalty between shaykhs and their disciples, and among shaykhs themselves, were the basis of the *a'yān*'s social networks.

The ties that bound teachers to students had much in common with those that bound *ṣūfīs* to their disciples. Learned shaykhs claimed the prestige of

¹ Zarnūjī, 32. Ibn Jamā'a also wrote that the student should be like a slave to his teacher: Ibn Jamā'a, 90.

şūfism and the intimacy of its human relationships for themselves. Writers of advice to the young did not hesitate to refer to a teacher as a spiritual guide or *murshid*.² One wrote that it was the ‘ulamā’ who were meant by the term *ahl al-dhikr* (a term usually referring to şūfis) in the Qur’ān.³ When the biographical dictionaries described the relationship of students to their shaykhs, it is clear that they saw the teacher as more than an expert in a body of knowledge. Yūnīnī’s biographical notice of one learned man, an entry typical of hundreds of others, shows how the learned represented relations between shaykhs and young people as moral and mimetic as well as intellectual: “He became his student, and was known by his companionship (*suḥba*) of the shaykh, and he devoted himself to the shaykh’s *suḥba*. The light of the shaykh and his baraka reflected upon him, and he modeled himself after the shaykh in his morals and manners.”⁴ The loyalties between young people and their shaykhs were sanctified, and long outlasted the relatively short period of their “companionship.” Dead shaykhs haunted their students in their dreams.⁵ Some were “known by” their shaykhs.⁶ Others adopted distinctive clothing on the model of their shaykhs.⁷ Men also requested burial with their shaykhs after their deaths, even when they had their own family tombs.⁸ Shaykhs were also models for opinions on the questions of the time. When the Shāfi‘ī chief qādī ‘Muhibb al-Dīn Ibn al-Zakī (d. 658/1260) became the disciple of Ibn ‘Arabī, he began to set (“yadhab ilā tafḍil”) ‘Alī over ‘Uthmān, on the model of his shaykh. This difficult transgression of the usual beliefs of his group worked its way into his dreams, which confirmed for him ‘Alī’s superiority.⁹

When young Damascenes set out to become learned shaykhs, they did not conceive of their training as impersonal, restricted to a specific time of life, in a specialized location, to a limited end. The family was the model for intimate relationships, and the a‘yān used language taken from the family to represent the ties they acquired with their shaykhs. Shaykhs occasionally compared knowledge explicitly to blood: “If one is ignorant of knowledge,” wrote one writer, “it is as though he is ignorant of his father. Knowledge for one who seeks it is a father, only better.”¹⁰ A poet made this association even more

² Ibn Jamā‘a, 88. ³ Ibn al-Hajj, 1/91.

⁴ “Talammadha lahu wa-‘urifa bi-suḥbatihī wa-khtasṣa bi-khidmatihī wa ‘ada anwāru’-shaykh wa-barakatuhu ‘alayhi wa-takhallaqa b’ikhlāqih”: Yūnīnī, 2/57.

⁵ “Zahara lahu ba‘d mawtih”: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 22/431, 4/79, 12/258; Ibn Kathīr, 13/52; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/217.

⁶ “Wa-‘urifa bihi”: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/250. For one of the muwallahin whose niṣba included his shaykh’s name see Jazārī, BN MS, 577.

⁷ See for example Yūnīnī, who wore his *qab‘a* – a small felt cap – with the wool on the exterior, on the model of his shaykh: Ibn Kathīr, 13/229.

⁸ Jazārī, BN MS, 26–7, 372; Ibn Shākir, ‘Uyān al-tawārikh, 21/75; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/180; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 66, 187; Ibn Kathīr, 13/318; Nu‘aymī, 1/86; Yūnīnī, 3/229. See also an anecdote concerning al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī related approvingly by Ibn Jamā‘a. The Khaṭīb, getting his customary three wishes after sipping the holy waters of zamzam, asked first to be permitted to write the *Tārīkh Baghdād*; second that the book fill the Manṣūr Mosque; and third that he be buried next to Bishr al-Ḥāfi: Ibn Jamā‘a, 139. ⁹ Ibn Kathīr, 13/258

¹⁰ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *Tabaqāt al-Fuqaha*, Hamidiye MS 537, fol. 2.

explicit: “The blood-tie of ‘ilm,’ he wrote or recited, “is superior to the blood-tie of kinship.”¹¹ Writers often compared family loyalties to loyalties among scholars. Shaykhs were “like fathers” to their disciples, and referred to them as their “sons.”¹² The prestige that attached itself to lineages in other societies adhered to scholarly pedigrees in Damascus, as cultivation of ‘ilm gave civilians their entry into the “nobility of learning.”¹³ “Knowledge,” wrote Ibn Qutayba, “is the highest nobility, just as love is the highest of ties.”¹⁴ An example of this association was a poem in praise of himself that Abū Shāma quoted with sincere approval: “Concerning the names in his lines of transmission, and their contents, he knows them as if they were part of his clan.”¹⁵

When the a‘yān inserted themselves into lines of transmission of ‘ilm they gained a pedigree that was in some respects more useful to them than that provided by their blood-line. Writers advised cutting off family ties in order to obtain ‘ilm, both to facilitate the arduous business of studying and to enter the “nobility of ‘ilm and the ‘ulamā’.”¹⁶ Ibn Jamā‘a quoted al-Baghdādī on the displacement of blood by ‘ilm: “No one will attain knowledge who does not close his shop or let his garden rot, and leave his brothers, and die far from his family with an unwitnessed funeral.”¹⁷ Whoever wanted ‘ilm should cut family ties to obtain it: “He who marries is sailing on a sea, and when he has a child he is sunk.”¹⁸ Although families provided the language and images for intimate relationships, they could not directly bestow the social status of their members. It was their cultural capital that constituted their true patrimony.

Making social bonds

How did elites imagine their place in the world and construct the social bonds necessary to their survival? The previous chapter discussed in passing several similarities between the struggles of the a‘yān and amīrs for monetized honors. It might seem logical to think of these two groups of elites as so dissimilar that they do not really bear comparison, much less study as a single group. Yet, in spite of the obvious differences between them, a‘yān and amīrs faced many of the same constraints and possibilities in forming households and groups and reproducing their status in time. Thus it should not be surprising that both

¹¹ “Luḥmatu'l-‘ilmī ta'lū luḥmata'n-nasab”: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/342.

¹² For three examples see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 136; Yūnīnī, 3/205; and especially Jazarī, BN MS, 437 for a shaykh who “was in the position of a father” to an amīr. Zarnūjī wrote, “He who teaches you one letter of those you need for your religious instruction is your father in religion”: Zarnūjī, 32. ¹³ For examples of sharaf al-‘ilm, see Yūnīnī, 2/52; Ṣafadī, 21/94.

¹⁴ Quoted in F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: the Concept of Knowledge in Mediaeval Islam* (Leiden, 1970), 257. ¹⁵ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 40.

¹⁶ For sharaf al-‘ilm see Ibn Jamā‘a, 70; for a book entitled in part “sharaf al-‘ilm w’al-‘ulamā’” see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/266. For a similar sentiment from Buyid Iran, see Mottahehdeh’s quote of al-Rāmhrūmuzī: “It is sufficient nobility for the transmitter that his name be joined with the name of the Prophet and be mentioned along with mention of Him and His family and His companions”: *Loyalty and Leadership*, 141. ¹⁷ Ibn Jamā‘a, 70. ¹⁸ Ibn Jamā‘a, 72.

groups represented the social universe, conceived of the nature of loyalties, and forged their social bonds in similar ways.

Both amīrs and a‘yān imagined their positions and their trajectories in the social universe in terms of “benefit.” In the absence of any “natural” social order (or theodicies of privilege such as superior breeding, lineage charisma, divine selection, or natural superiority that often underpin one) most members of the elite represented their status as compensation for the altruistic “benefit” they provided others.¹⁹ Most exchanges among surplus-consuming groups, whether economic, political, cultural, or social, were represented as the bequeathing of benefit from one person to another. The cure of the physician, the exploit of the soldier, the service of the clerk or secretary, the favor of the powerful, the intercession of the influential, the friendship of the scholar, the waqf of the benefactor, the edicts and appointments of the ruler, and the productions of the ‘ulamā’ were all represented as “benefits.”²⁰ This experience of the world in terms of benefit extended to the cosmos: the sun when it rises also spreads benefit.²¹ In the biographical dictionaries, the various words for benefit (naf‘, fā‘ida, maṣlaḥa, and their derivatives) often appear many times in a single entry.

The a‘yān represented their honorifics, honors, cultural productions, initiations into texts, and social bonds as benefits. A common honorific for a shaykh was *mufid* (one who provides benefit), and the reputation of a scholar among the common people was partly due to the “benefit” they received from him or her.²² The learned elite also represented their cultural productions – lectures,

¹⁹ For the social and political uses of “benefit” among ruling groups in Buyid Iraq, from which my reading of Damascus has benefited greatly, cf. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 73–9, 82–4.

²⁰ The terms naf‘ and ifāda appear so frequently and in so many contexts in the sources that it would be impossible to attempt to cite them all. The following are a number of examples of a way of imagining social life that is inscribed in virtually every page of the chronicles and biographical dictionaries: ‘ilm a naf‘: Ibn Kathir, 13/325; a marginal commentary a benefit: Ibn Khallikān, 1/91; relating ḥadīth a benefit: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 359; Jazārī, BN MS, 68; lessons a benefit to students: Ibn Jamā‘a, 216; building mosques, lavatories, and baths a benefit: Ibn Kathir, 13/337–8; 14/103, 116; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 82; medicine provides or fails to provide naf‘: Sibīl Ibn al-Jawzi, *Miṣāṭ*, 8/550; Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 13/388; the cure of the physician provides naf‘: Ibn Shākir, *Fawātī*, 2/317; Ibn al-Hājj, 1/88; friendship as naf‘: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Tabaqāt*, 4/274; prayer a naf‘: Ibn Rajab, 2/101; the duty of the sultān to employ people who will provide benefit: Subkī, *Mu‘id al-nī‘am*, 28; patronage of the learned a naf‘: Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 11/200; naf‘ as political favor: Ibn Abī Usaybi‘a, 729, 730; Ibn Kathir, 14/56; Nu‘aymī, 1/235–6; Jazārī, BN MS, 223; making clocks and astrolabes a naf‘: Ibn Kathir, 14/168; waqf as naf‘: Subkī, *Mu‘id al-nī‘am*, 145; donating a library to “benefit the Muslims”: Yūnīnī, 4/185; giving advice about a blunder in adab an ifāda: Ibn Jamā‘a, 93; political mediation a benefit: Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 10/260; Ibn Taymiyya’s meeting with the Mongol Ghazān in 699/1299–1300 a naf‘: Ibn Kathir, 14/7. ²¹ Qalqashandī, 12/19.

²² See for example the love of amīrs, soldiers, merchants, notables, ‘ulamā’, and common people for Ibn Taymiyya, because “he was devoted to their benefit, night and day, with tongue and pen”: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, BL MS, 3; Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, quoting Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al- Islām*, Kōp. MS, 47. Among the many honorifics other than the very common use of *mufid* by itself are:

debates, public readings and other open audiences, fatwās, and books – as benefits.²³ Writers, copyists, public readers, and commentators gave as the reason for their efforts the provision of benefit.²⁴ Of Ibn al-Qalānīs the historian, to cite one example among many, it was said, “no one approached him, or became his companion, without gaining benefit from him.”²⁵ When shaykhs came together it was to benefit one another, and they regretted the deaths of their companions because it meant the end of the benefits to be obtained from them.²⁶ Shaykhs also saw their mansabs as recompense for the “benefits” they conferred.²⁷ In a world in which social honor and position were won rather than inherited, gaining and giving benefit was seen as the point of life.

The initiation of the young was seen as a process in which young people

“muḥaddith Baghdād wa-muṣtīdūhā”: Ibn Rajab, 2/353; “muṣīd Baghdād”: Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, fol. 44a; “muṣīd al-umma”: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, BL MS, 5, 7; “muṣīd al-mu‘ādhīnīn”: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, BL MS, 7; “kānz al-muṣtafiḍīn”: Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, BL MS, 11; “shaykh at-talaba wa-muṣīduhūm”: Ibn Kathīr, 14/126; “muṣīd al-wara”: Ṣafadī, 21/86. For a later example of how a suggested format for an ijāza at-tadrīs referred to teaching as “ifāda,” see Qalqashandī, 14/325. Misreadings of the term ifāda and its derivatives are characteristic of how scholars have formalized juristic literature. Discussing the mu‘īd and the muṣīd, Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 176 writes: “These two posts may be compared to those of the modern ‘teaching fellows’ or ‘assistants,’ held by graduate students working towards their doctoral degrees.” Berkey, *Transmission of Knowledge*, 40–2, largely follows Makdisi’s sources and conclusions on the mu‘īd and muṣīd as “teaching assistants,” adding that the latter functioned “informally.” Neither Makdisi nor Berkey reads their main source – Subkī’s *Mu‘īd al-nī‘am* – critically on this issue. Berkey, 40, sees the source as a tract written by an “experienced educator” intended to define “the proper behavior of those employed in a variety of academic, religious, bureaucratic, and economic tasks.” Neither Makdisi nor Berkey deals with the possibility that by abstracting from legal discussions of suitability for receiving waqf income, we risk formalizing legal distinctions into differentiated institutional structures and functions. There is no evidence that in Damascus muṣīds were thought of as advanced students or even that they had any “functions” or “duties.” What neither Makdisi nor Berkey mentions is that perhaps the most common term for teaching of all kinds was ifāda – the provision of fā‘ida or benefit. One of the most common honorifics for teachers and shaykhs in the biographical dictionaries for Damascus was muṣīd. Taking everything into consideration, a fair guess might be that the muṣīds mentioned in the juristic literature were mature men who resided in madrasas, some of whom consumed enough endowment income to warrant the occasional fatwā concerning their legal status.

²³ Lessons and lectures were “beneficial” (“muṣīda yantafī‘ū bihā an-nās”): Ibn Kathīr, 14/179; a ḥadīth session loses its benefit if it goes on too long: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 369; a debate produced “benefit”: Yūnīnī, 2/142; a lecturer demonstrated his benefits after his appointment to a madrasa: Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, fol. 45b; a Qur‘ān reader benefited whoever read with him: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 10/267; a book was beneficial (“nāfi‘ muṣīd”): Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6/245; a writer was referred to as the “benefactor of the Muslims” because of his writings: Birzālī, *Mu‘jam al-shuyūkh*, Zāhirīyya MS, 21a.

²⁴ The adjective most often employed to praise a book was muṣīd, repeated thousands of times in the sources. Books written for fā‘ida: Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 3b; Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 311. Marginal comments to a text were fā‘idas, as in “wa-zāda ‘alā aṣl fawā‘ida jalila”: Yūnīnī, 3/75; copying a text a fā‘ida: Ibn al-Hājj, 4/84

²⁵ Ibn Shākir, 21/32; Yūnīnī, 3/37, 38. For another example of ṣuḥbā conceived as benefit see Ibn Khallikān, 2/230.

²⁶ For death as the end of a shaykh’s benefits to others see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 131.

²⁷ See Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/264.

sought, and shaykhs provided, benefit.²⁸ The point of seeking out a shaykh was to find benefit, and the point of taking on a disciple was to provide it.²⁹ Students and other seekers after knowledge were often called *mustafidin*, those who seek *fā'ida*, as teaching and reciting *ḥadīth* were called *ifāda*, providing benefit.³⁰ When a traveling scholar arrived in the city, he sought a place to “set himself up to benefit.”³¹ One grammarian fished for students by standing in front of the *Ādiliyya al-Kubrā* and shouting to passers-by: “Is there anyone who would benefit, is there anyone who would become learned?”³² When women taught other women, they “benefited” them.³³ In the biographical dictionaries, *ifāda* was probably the most common term for education itself. Fields of knowledge were rated for the benefit they provided their scholars. The study of *ḥadīth*, for example, was lauded by one of its partisans as “the most beneficial of all of the beneficial sciences (*anfa' al-funūn an-nāfi'a*).”³⁴

The elites of Damascus as elsewhere divided the social universe into insiders and outsiders. Here the principle of social division was not between the pure and the impure, or between the naturalness of the well bred and the affectation of the social climber, but rather between the beneficial and the useless. “The worst of people,” quoted Ibn al-Ḥājj from a *ḥadīth*, “is a learned man who does not benefit others by his learning.”³⁵ Moralists advised young people not to associate with anyone who would not bring them benefit and whom they would not benefit themselves. “It is important for the student to abandon socializing – this is the most critical thing a student may do, especially those without family (*jins*). The defect of socializing is that it is a waste of time without benefit (*fā'ida*).”³⁶

Loyalties

Even more than in Sung China or the Latin West, where political relationships were also experienced as ties of affection, the political and social history of the medieval Middle East cannot be addressed without consideration of the

²⁸ For several examples among many of the description of teaching as benefit, see Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, BL MS, 13: “*istafāda w'ifāda*”; Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 122b for a shaykh who sat on the steps of the Umayyad Mosque, “benefiting listeners (*yanfa'* *at-ṭālibīn*).” A commonplace in a death-notice was “he sought out benefit and benefited [others]”: see Ibn Khallikān, 2/366 for one example.

²⁹ See two admonitions by Ibn Jamā'a: “If the person whose *baraka* you seek is obscure, then the *naf'* is all the greater, and what one gains from him is all the more complete”; “To get the *naf'* of the teacher, you should regard him as the very eye of perfection”: Ibn Jamā'a, 86–8.

³⁰ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/457: “*sami'a bi-ifāda khālihi*”; see also Ibn al-Salāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 359.

³¹ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/76: “*thumma qadima Dimashqa w'antaṣaba l'il-ifāda*.”

³² “*Hal min mustafid hal min muta'allim*”: Shumaysī, *Madāris dimashq*, 134. See also Ibn Kathīr, 14/50 for an example of shaykhs seeking benefit from Ibn Taymiyya (“*yataradid ilayhi al-akābir w'al-a'yān w'al-fuqahā' . . . yastafidūna minhu*”). ³³ Ibn Kathīr, 14/189.

³⁴ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 75. ³⁵ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1/65. ³⁶ Ibn Jamā'a, 83.

history of sentiment.³⁷ In a monetized society in which warrior households continuously redistributed property and status, a‘yān and amīrs could not inherit their socially or politically useful affiliations through legal mechanisms. Instead, both groups experienced their critical bonds as ties of intimacy. They especially valued practices rooted in patriarchal households that gave them useful intimacy with powerful men.³⁸

The military had few or no hereditary affinities; neither did they have any legal or contractual ties to ruling groups. Rather, as mentioned above, soldiers acquired their critical relationships within households and commands. These ties were expressed in the language of household intimacy, a language that is surprisingly similar to that of the Latin West, but one which was all the more powerful for the absence of any form of *stabilitas loci*. We can see this especially in examining how socially and politically useful ties were conceived in terms of “love.” There were several more or less interchangeable terms for love, including *hubb*, *mahabba*, *mawadda*, and *tawaddud*. The significance of all these terms differs from sentimental love in the modern sense, and includes associations of “friendly feeling,” and “esteem.” It was closely allied to “friendship” (*ṣadāqa*), and had uses and meanings that were similar to *amicitia* in the Latin West. Powerful men displayed their love for others publicly through gifts, mansabs, and honors. The formula for the favor of a powerful man for a client, one which appears again and again in the sources, was “he loved him and honored him” (*ahabbahu w’akramahu*). Sovereigns expressed their relations to one another as bonds of love.³⁹ They also experienced their ties to their subjects as ties of love, as their subjects (in theory) loved them in return.⁴⁰ Within ruling groups, love was also the basis of political loyalty. Sultāns, governors, and amīrs did not command secretaries, amīrs, and shaykhs; rather, they “loved” them, as they loved members of their households.⁴¹ In return, they pretended not to expect automatic obedience to their sovereign wills so much as voluntary service (*khidma*), itself represented as animated by love.⁴² Given the constant formation and reformation of warrior factions around the households of amīrs and sultāns, “love” was as much an instrument of politics as it was an emotion.

As crucial as love was in establishing new ties, it was also disruptive. The

³⁷ The pioneering study in this regard is Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*.

³⁸ Cf. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*.

³⁹ See for example the *mawadda* Berke Khan had for Baybars: Yūnīnī, 2/365. For some examples among many of the love of rulers or governors for their amīrs see Yūnīnī, 3/68; Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 25a; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 11/196. For the love of an amīr for a bureaucrat: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 5/14.

⁴⁰ For example see Jazārī, BN MS, 247.

⁴¹ See Nu‘aymī, 1/217 for the “love” Saladin had for his nephew (ibn ‘amm) al-Malik al-Muzaffar, leading him to grant him Ḥamā and eventually many other cities.

⁴² For a few examples of hundreds that might be cited of rulers and amīrs who “loved” the ‘ulama’ and other civilians, see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/647, 696, 702; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 12/36; Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 84a; Yūnīnī, 2/354, 398, 4/67; Nu‘aymī, 2/10. See the governor Tankiz’s reception of a secretary returning from Cairo: “Greetings to one whom we love and who loves us (marḥabān bi-man nuḥibbuhu wa-yuḥibbunā)”: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 10/260.

“excessive” love the sultān conceived for a new client or mamlūk threatened his longer-serving supporters.⁴³ Hubb was also dangerous when political relations turned sexual, or vice versa. When Sultān Muḥammad Ibn Qalawūn conceived a sexual passion for the son of one of his amīrs, and gave him the command of a thousand horse, this “excessive love” (*mahabba ghāliyya*) was much resented.⁴⁴ From the perspective of established elites, love could cut across established loyalties dangerously. The learned elite feared the loyalties of the common people to holy men as *hubb ghāli*, excessive love, one that could lead to “disruptive” conflict (*ta’assub*).⁴⁵ When the followers of a ruler became the spiritual disciples of a shaykh, the love they bore the shaykh could be politically dangerous. The ruler of Mosul complained of a shaykh who attracted his entourage (*khawāṣṣ*), “they love him more than they love me.”⁴⁶ Because of its utility and its danger, elites tried both to mobilize love for their own purposes and to control its effects when it was used by others.

Acquired relations of intimacy were also critical to a^īyān strategies of social survival. The a^īyān experienced their useful loyalties as love, and expressed them in similar language taken from the patriarchal household. As was true of warriors, shaykhs created their crucial loyalties from scratch through love. Shaykhs served amīrs and rulers because of their love for them, as amīrs and sultāns “loved” ‘ilm and the ‘ulamā⁴⁷ Shaykhs constructed their relations with one another, with their disciples, and between themselves and the rest of the population through bonds of love. Love could bring one shaykh into the intimate circle (*khūṣūsiyya*) of another.⁴⁸ The love between two shaykhs could be so strong they would move from one city to another to be with one another.⁴⁹ Shaykhs would also “cleave to” the audiences of others out of love.⁵⁰ Young people in turn approached shaykhs, and gained benefit from them, through strategies of love. This is one reason why the disciples or admirers of a shaykh were represented as his *muhibbūn* – those who loved him.⁵¹ Shaykhs also “loved” dead shaykhs, as was the case of the physician

⁴³ See Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 10/299; Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Zubda*, 151. ⁴⁴ Ṣafadī, *Aīyān*, 25a.
⁴⁵ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/396. For excessive love of the common people for a holy man who reveled in dirt see Ibn Kathīr, 13/298. For a shaykh who experienced excessive love for another see Jazārī, BN MS, 4. ⁴⁶ Ibn Shākir, 21/299: “wa-hum yuhibūnahu akthar minī.”

⁴⁷ Dhahabi, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 28; Jazārī, BN MS, 415.

⁴⁸ Subki, Staatsbibliothek MS, 20; Subki, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6/253 for love as a bond between shaykhs.

⁴⁹ Yūnīnī, 3/95. ⁵⁰ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mīrāt*, 8/675–6.

⁵¹ For two examples of the relationship between young people and their shaykhs as a tie of love, see Ṣafadī, *Aīyān*, 14b, 17a. For two examples of muhibbūn referring to followers or admirers see Dhahabi, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 56: “lahu aṣḥāb wa-muhibbūn”; and Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, BL MS, 3: “lahu muhibbūn mina’l-‘ulama’.” Examples of the love of the population for the learned are frequent in the sources. Of Birzālī, for example, it was said that people of all groups (ṭawā’if) loved him: Ibn Kathīr, 14/185. When Ibn Qudāma resided in Isfahan, so great was the love of the city for him that if he had wanted to rule it he could have: Ibn Rajab, 2/14. Another Damascene, Ibn al-Zamlakānī, was said to have excited love in the hearts of everyone who saw him: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/215. The love that large numbers of people bore a shaykh was considered a kind of divine gift; of one shaykh it was said, “God made the love of him descend into the hearts of the people (wa-qad awqa’ā Allah mahabbatahu fi qulubīl-khalq)”: Dhahabi, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 14.

who “became enamored” of Auicenna through loving his discourse.⁵² Finally, shaykhs “loved” knowledge, and applied to it the language of affection that they applied to one another.⁵³ Amīrs and a‘yān conceived of love in a similar manner, and made use of it to form their ever-shifting social networks.

Ties of service and attendance: *khidma, mulāzama, taraddud, şühaba*

Both military and civilian elites understood their ties of loyalty, dependence, and reciprocal obligation as voluntary service or *khidma*. Unlike such forms of service in the Latin West as vassalage or the contract of the stipendiarii, the duties of *khidma* were not defined in a legal or contractual sense, nor were there formal ceremonies of homage associated with it, though the language by which it was expressed had a number of similarities.⁵⁴ *Khidma* referred in the first place to household ties, especially to the personal service of children and servants to their elders and masters, and to the obligations of hospitality.⁵⁵ *Khidma* also referred to service at courts, which were themselves structured as households, and in foundations, *diwāns*, and the retinues of powerful men.⁵⁶ With *khidma* as with *ḥubb*, elites made use of practices rooted in the patriarchal household to forge useful ties of intimacy.

Most ties of subordination or dependence were understood as *khidma*. The defendant or supporter, civilian or military, of a powerful man was known as his “servant” (*khādim*).⁵⁷ The court of the ruler was known as the *khidma*. Amīrs, mamlūks, and people who received stipends from a ruler were said to be in his service.⁵⁸ When one ruler supported another, his political support

⁵² “Wa-kāna yuḥibbu kalāma’sh-shaykh Ibn Sīnā fi’t-ṭibbi mughrāmān lah”: Şafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 14/129.

⁵³ See for example the love for hadith that mature men bore in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 75.

⁵⁴ On the contractual relationship of the stipendiarii to a ruling household see M. Chibnall, “Mercenaries and the *Familia Regis* under Henry I,” *History* 62 (1977); Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 90–1; J.O. Prestwich, “The Military Household of the Norman Kings,” *English Historical Review* 96 (1981), 1–35.

⁵⁵ For a son who “served” his mother see Yūnīnī, 1/395. See the proverb: “There are four things which the superior man cannot disdain, even if he be an amīr: standing when meeting his father, service to a learned man one learns something from, asking questions about subjects one knows nothing about, and service to a guest”: Ibn Jamā‘a, 110.

⁵⁶ For the labor of a physician in a hospital (*bināristān*) as *khidma*, see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 659; for the retinue of the sultān as his *khidma* see Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/183.

⁵⁷ Nu‘aymī, 1/532; Ibn Kathīr, 14/154. For a soldier (*jundī*) who entered the service of an amīr see Şafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 1/232; for a physician in the service of an envoy on a diplomatic mission see Ibn al-Ṣuqā‘ī, 78; for learned men, lecturers, poets, and literati in the service of sultāns or amīrs see Sibī‘ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āt*, 8/693–4, 743; Yūnīnī, 2/142; Jazārī, BN MS, 330; for an example of the relationship of an amīr to the sultān as *khidma* see Yūnīnī, 2/8; for an amīr in the service of a powerful civilian see Şafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/87; for the *khidma*, ordered by the sultān, of the qādī of Nablus to the emperor during his visit to Jerusalem see Ibn Wāṣil, 4/244; a physician in the *bināristān* or a secretary in a *diwān* were thought of as being in *khidma*: Şafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 6/48, 18/515; Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 86; Ibn Ḥajar, 1/76.

⁵⁸ For example, see the learned men, poets, and literati in the *khidma* of al-Malik al-Nāṣir, who received high stipends from him: Yūnīnī, 2/142. For amīrs and mamlūks in the *khidma* of the sultān see *Tārīkh al-salāṭīn wa al-mulūk*, 74r.

was represented as service.⁵⁹ To support a contender in fitna, or to come to the aid of one's khushdāsh was to "enter his service."⁶⁰ An army's organization was not in formal regiments, but was conceived rather as the service of its various amīrs to its most powerful amīr.⁶¹ Although it carried no contractual obligations, service was bound by reciprocal obligations: an amīr was never to forget his obligations to a mamlūk in his khidma.⁶² Rulers and amīrs, themselves beneficiaries of the service of others, liked to represent their relationship to the learned as being one of service to them. Al-Malik al-Nāṣir Yūsuf said of his relationship to a shaykh he had appointed to the Ribāt al-Nāṣirī: "We did not make him the shaykh of this place so that he could serve us, but rather that we might serve him."⁶³ In a similar manner, the deputy sultān in Egypt put himself in the service of the šūfi shaykh al-Khadir al-Mehrānī, who had a following among the ruling amīrs of Egypt.⁶⁴ It was by such small symbolic reversals that the military maintained both the fiction of the sovereignty of religion and the reality of their ideological dependence on civilians.

The aŷān also conceived of their bonds to one another as ties of service. The aŷān served men to whom they were not related, and in turn expected service from those who owed them deference due to their learning.⁶⁵ Many of the aŷān of the city spent some time in the service of a great shaykh, and considered themselves to have life-long obligations to him.⁶⁶ The aŷān represented their service in the domain of knowledge as analogous to service to individuals or the courts of the powerful: shaykhs were in the khidma of knowledge.⁶⁷ Service among shaykhs was not restricted to education; nor

⁵⁹ One Ayyūbid ruler who supported another "served him excellently (khadamahu khidmatan ʻazīma)": Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirāt*, 8/618. The relationship of the bedouin leader ʻIsā Ibn al-Muhammān to Sungur al-Ashqar was expressed as his service to him: Ibn Shākir, 21/243–4.

⁶⁰ "Jaʻa fi khidmatihī," said of one amīr during a fitna: Ibn Kathīr, 13/305; for the relationship of khidma to khushdāshiyah during a fitna ("huwa khushdāshī wa-anā fi khidmatih") see Jazārī, BN MS, 397.

⁶¹ Jazārī, BN MS, 497, for amīrs' entry into the khidma of the commander of an army. For one example of how the organization of an army was conceived as the retinues of individuals rather than regiments, see Jazārī, BN MS, 559, for the arrival of the Egyptian army in Damascus in 698/1298–9. The people of Damascus described it by the names of the amīrs in it.

⁶² Ibn Shākir, 21/38. See also Ibn Wāṣil, 4/255 for an account of the sultān's frequenting someone in gratitude for service to his uncle.

⁶³ "Mā jaʻalnāhu shaykhan fi hādhā l-makān illā li-nakhdimahu lā li-yakhdimanā": Yūnīnī, 4/300. ⁶⁴ Yūnīnī, 3/265.

⁶⁵ Makdisi sees the khādim as a servant to wealthy students or to lecturers: *The Rise of Colleges*, 222–3; Makdisi, "La corporation à l'époque classique de l'Islam," 204.

⁶⁶ See for example Ibn Jamāʻa's detailed prescriptions for the service of shaykhs: the student must support the shaykh during the shaykh's lifetime, and look after his loved ones and family after his death, and undertake to visit his tomb and to pray for him: Ibn Jamāʻa, 87–90. Some students served their shaykhs by living in their houses: Yūnīnī, 4/184. For Shaʻrānī's later discussion of the role of khidma in šūfism – "he who draws near to his shaykh through acts of service draws near to God (man taqarrabā ilā shaykhihi b'il-khidam taqarrabā l-haqqa taʻālā)": Shaʻrānī, *al-Anwār al-Qudsīyya fi mā rifa al-qawāʼid al-ṣūfiyya*, Taha ʻAbd al-Bāqī Sarfūr and al-Sayyid Muhammad ʻId al-Shāfiʻī eds. (Beirut, n.d.), 2/16.

⁶⁷ Ṣafadī, *Aŷān*, 13a.

should we confuse it with servitude. It was a relationship that they entered upon willingly without expectation of material reward.⁶⁸ Even though service appears in the sources most frequently in the context of the relationship of young people to their shaykhs, it was also one dimension of a bond between shaykhs.⁶⁹ Service produced ties of deference and obligation between people for their lifetimes, but these ties did not extend beyond the tomb or attach themselves to lineages. After his death the followers of an important lecturer attended a lecture of his son, “as a service to him (khidmatan lahu),” but the son did not inherit the father’s loyalties.⁷⁰

Service was accompanied by a number of other forms of personal attendance, among them *mulāzama*, *ziyāra*, *taraddud*, and *ṣuhba*. Scholars have studied these practices as aspects of higher education or everyday piety.⁷¹ However, their social uses were more varied, and a‘yān and amīrs alike made use of them. *Lāzama*, which meant “he kept, confined himself, clave, clung, or held fast, to him,” referred to the continuous physical propinquity of a follower to a powerful man. In the case of amīrs this produced advancement; in the case of shaykhs *lāzama* was a initiatic relationship that produced baraka.⁷² *Mulāzama* was often associated with service, as in the case of the amīr who was ordered to the *mulāzama* and the service of Baybars.⁷³ It also expressed the tie between shaykhs and favored young people. Ibn Taymiyya, for example, impressed by a boy’s performance in a session of Qur’ān interpretation, promised him: “If you cleave to me (*lāzamani*) for a year, you will benefit.”⁷⁴ *Taraddud* meant to “frequent” someone, often expressed in visits.⁷⁵ Where *mulāzama* implied constant propinquity, *taraddud* meant

⁶⁸ For examples see the amīr who served one of the a‘yān: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/87, and the group of young men who, upon hearing that an Andalusian ṣūfi was making the hajj, “went out to serve him (takharraja fi khidma)”: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/62. Ṣūfi shaykhs also received khidma from their followers: Ibn Kathīr, 14/151.

⁶⁹ A shaykh attended a majlis given by a visitor to his town and served him: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’at*, 8/768. One of the followers (*ashāb*) of a shaykh accompanied him from Egypt, dwelt in the shaykh’s madrasa, and served him for forty years: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 207–11; another shaykh was known for his service to people in prayer: Ibn Rajab, 2/49.

⁷⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 14/153. Zarnūjī advised students to treat their shaykhs’ families with respect, and quoted with approval the example of a student who rose to his feet whenever the sons of his lecturer passed by: Zarnūjī, 33.

⁷¹ See for examples Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 34–5; Makdisi, “Ṣuhba et riyasa dans l’enseignement médiéval,” in *Recherches d’Islamologie. Recueil d’articles offerts à Georges C. Anawati et Louis Gardet par leurs collègues et leurs amis* (Louvain, 1978).

⁷² Lane, *suppl.*, s.v. LZM. For examples see Yūnīnī, 3/46; for Sultān Baybar’s *mulāzama* of his shaykh Khādir see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/334; for the baraka gained by *mulāzama* or *ṣuhba* see Jazārī, BN MS, 72.

⁷³ Ibn Shākir, 21/37. *Mulāzama* also meant something like “take care of” as with the keeper of the clock at the Umayyad Mosque, whose labors were described as *mulāzama*: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 14/128.

⁷⁴ The boy did so, and reported later: “There fell upon me during his discourse benefits (fawā’id) which I never heard from anyone else, nor encountered in a book”: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/22.

⁷⁵ For two examples of the many that could be cited of *taraddud*, see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 141, 179. See also the valorization of *taraddud* as-ṣulahā – frequenting the virtuous to seek baraka from them: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/226.

regular contact. To “frequent” someone’s doors was usually how those who had little power or prestige approached those who had. The civilians of the city who wanted to acquire some of the baraka and prestige of learning would “frequent” the ‘ulamā’; and people who were in the ṣuhba of one shaykh would “frequent” others.⁷⁶ As was the case with ṣuhba, when powerful men “frequented” shaykhs, they showed to the world at large their dependence on them.⁷⁷

Another way of acquiring socially useful ties was the visitation or ziyāra. Visitation was a nearly universal practice in the pre-modern Middle East, and Christians as well as Muslims practiced it.⁷⁸ Scholars have generally restricted their examination of ziyāra to the visitation of tombs in šūfism or popular religion. However, ziyāra included a much wider variety of practices of visiting people, living or dead, and sacred places, for the baraka to be gained from them. Almost all sections of the population, including rulers, sought baraka through visitation.⁷⁹

Learned shaykhs were both practitioners of ziyāra and objects of it. Among the young and their shaykhs alike the ziyāra or the single visit to a scholar was at one end of a continuum of practices that ended on the other with the constant companionship of ṣuhba and mulāzama.⁸⁰ Learned men with baraka and their tombs or birthplaces were objects of popular visitation, much as šūfis were.⁸¹ Fathers also took their sons to shaykhs for

⁷⁶ For one example of someone who frequented the ‘ulama’ see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 179.

⁷⁷ A sultān frequented an amīr who had served his uncle al-Malik al-Nāṣir: Ibn Wāṣil, 4/255; al-Malik al-Mu’azzam frequented a scholar to read al-Zamakhshari’s grammar with him: Ibn Kathir, 13/72.

⁷⁸ For Christian ziyāra as viewed by Muslim writers, see Yūnīnī, 3/111 for a priest who was sought out for his baraka; and Ibn Wāṣil, 4/244 for the pilgrimage of the emperor to the holy places during the truce of 626/1228–9 understood as ziyāra. The military incorporated ziyāra into their own relations. The tomb of Kutub became an object of ziyāra after his death until Baybars made it inaccessible: Ibn Kathir, 13/225–6. On ziyāra to holy places around Damascus see ‘Alī b. Abū Bakr al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-īshārāt fī mā rifa’ al-ziyārāt*, J. Sourdé-Thomine ed. (Damascus, 1953), trans. by J. Sourdé-Thomine as “Guide des lieux de pèlerinage” (Damascus, 1957). On ziyāra in Mamlūk Egypt see C. Taylor, “The Cult of the Saints in Late Medieval Egypt,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1989).

⁷⁹ For examples of rulers who made a visitation to learned shaykhs see Sibīl Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/548, 616, 688; Yūnīnī, 2/142; Ṣafadī, *al-Wājīt*, 18/133; Ibn Kathir 13/299.

⁸⁰ For evidence that these practices were imagined as a continuum, see Ibn Shākir, 21/299, for the holy man who grew food for “those who were of his ṣuhba, those who frequented him, and those who visited him.” See also Jazāri, BN MS, 72 for a distinction made between ṣuhba and mulāzama – “sāhabahu aw lāzamahu.”

⁸¹ For an example of a ziyāra to a living scholar for his baraka see Ibn Kathir, 14/4–5. Tombs of scholars visited included those of Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn ‘Asākir: Sibīl Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/641; Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi, Kop. MS, 134. For ziyāra to a shaykh’s birthplace see Ibn Khallikān, 2/417. Abū ‘Umar Ibn Qudāma’s tomb illustrates how a scholar and holy man’s tomb became an object of veneration. He was buried by the roadside outside the city, and the place of his burial soon became an object of ziyāra. Al-Shāfi’ī was enlisted to approve the visitation of the tomb by his appearance in a dream declaring that he too visited Abū ‘Umar. Eventually a saying emerged that “he who visits the tomb of Abū ‘Umar on a Friday night, it is as though he has visited the ka’ba; take off your shoes before praying there”: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 74–5. See Ibn Tūlūn, *al-Qalā’id al-jawhariyya*, for the posthumous fates of some of

baraka.⁸² Young people who could not “cleave to” shaykhs or enter their service visited them to acquire their personal baraka or the baraka of their learning.

Shaykhs also made use of visitation to sanctify their bonds amongst themselves.⁸³ The ziyāra overlapped with traveling in search of ḥadīth, as scholars moved from place to place “visiting” other scholars.⁸⁴ The learned also represented their socializing with one another as a form of ziyāra.⁸⁵ Ziyāras of this nature could have (and one suspects often did) political uses, as in the visitation of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ to Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, the point of which was to seek his intercession with the ruler.⁸⁶ Becoming an object of visitation was also a sign of distinction. To the learned elite, having visitors arrive from the four quarters (*al-afāq*) was one of the highest marks of scholarly prestige.⁸⁷ Such people in turn were constrained by the obligations of hospitality. One shaykh, known for treating the amīrs, poor people, the rich, and the powerless equally, greeted them all with a single formula: “Your khidma has brought us joy – how blessed is this hour.”⁸⁸ Like mulāzama, khidma, and taraddud, ziyāra was a practice that transmuted propinquity into useful intimacy.

Another practice by which military and civilian elites constructed social bonds was *suḥba*.⁸⁹ Together with mulāzama and service, references to *suḥba* in the sources are so frequent that it is easy to become blinded by their

these twelfth- and thirteenth-century scholars in the early sixteenth century, when their tombs were visited and venerated in a manner similar to the ziyāra to tombs of ṣūfīs. Living scholars were also objects of popular veneration. This was the fate of the Hanbali scholar Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma, brother of the above. Expelled from Damascus for his uncompromising advocacy of Hanbali theology, while living “in obscurity” in Cairo he nonetheless found it difficult to walk to the mosque for the number of people who awaited him in the streets to seek his baraka: Ibn Rajab, 2/14. The same was true of Ibn Taymiyya, who after his release from prison became an object of ziyāra: Ibn Kathir, 14/47. See also the shaykh in Ḥimṣ who held two majālis, one for the talaba al-ilm, and the other for the groups (*wuṣūd*) who came to visit: al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 6/79. For the ziyāra to the shaykh Ibn Qawām see Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 10/245; Ibn Shākir, *Fawātī*, 1/224. Funerals of the major scholars of the city were often major events, attended by much of the population: see L. Frescobaldi, *Viaggi in Terra Santa di Leonardo Frescobaldi e d'altri del secolo XIV* (Florence, 1862), 28, on funerals he witnessed in Damascus in 1384–5: “Hanno di costume quando e' muore uno cittadino da bene de farlo seppellire a'loro cimiteri, che sono fuori della terra in un campo . . . ed accompagnarlo gran numero di cittadini, secondo la condizione dell'uomo.”⁹⁰ See for example Yunīnī, 3/191.

⁸³ For people among the learned who made ziyāras, see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/457, 614. For an expedition to a holy man, see the ziyāra made by a group of eighteen who visited a holy man and stayed with him for a month: Yunīnī, 1/405.

⁸⁴ See Ibn Khallikān, 3/294: “No one visited Irbil without hastening to visit shaykh (bādara ilā ziyāra) . . . Ibn al-Mubārak, and they approached his heart from all directions.” The shaykh was learned in ḥadīth and its ancillary sciences, and a large number of other fields.

⁸⁵ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/747; Yunīnī, 2/54, 330; Ibn Shākir, *Fawātī*, 1/73 of the Cairo 1951 edition.⁹¹ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/758.

⁸⁷ See for example Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 22/299. ⁸⁸ Jazārī, BN MS, 369.

⁸⁹ On *suḥba* see Makdīsī, *The Rise of Colleges*, 128–33; Makdīsī, “Suḥba et riyasa,” 207–11. Makdīsī was the first scholar to raise the importance of *suḥba* to Islamic education, but has restricted his interest so far largely to the teacher-student relationship. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 34–5, has largely followed Makdīsī on the issue. However, looking at *suḥba* solely in the context of education or as a form of “discipleship” misses many of its wider meanings and uses.

ubiquity. *Şuhba* is usually translated as “companionship” or “fellowship,” and can often be translated verbally, such as “he began accompanying someone,” or “he joined someone.” Its meanings and uses, however, were wider than that which is implied by companionship or fellowship, and ranged from affiliation to a group to subordination to a powerful individual. Among a‘yān and amīrs alike *şuhba* was the basis of the temporary groups that constituted the main social networks of the city.⁹⁰ The political elite represented its social bonds as the pairing of *şuhba* to *khidma*. When the bedouin leader ʻIsā Ibn al-Muhammā allied himself to Baybars, the sources wrote that he entered his *şuhba* and his *khidma*.⁹¹ Factional affiliation was thought of as a tie of *şuhba*, and *şuhba* was itself one of the most common words for faction.

Şuhba, like service, was considered a duty that carried with it the considerable obligations of hospitality. An anecdote quoted for its moral value recounted the dilemma of a Muslim holy man taken prisoner by Crusader bandits (*harāmiyya*). In the middle of the night, tied up while his captors were sleeping, he heard some Muslim bandits approaching. Although he could have saved himself by raising the alarm, he woke his captors and went into hiding with them. When they asked him why he saved them when he could have been freed, he replied, “It was because I was your companion (*şahibtukum*) and ate your bread. Truly *şuhba* is a mighty thing (inna š-şuhba ‘azīza).”⁹²

Şuhba referred to a variety of loyalties among the civilian elite, including ties between a civilian and an amīr, ties among the civilian elite, and ties between older and younger men. Even though it can be translated “friendship, discipleship, companionship, affiliation,” it implied the attendance of one person on the person of another. As *şuhba* and *khidma* referred to the critical political bonds among the military, they were also paired among civilians, as in the case of the shaykh whose companions (*ashāb*) served him.⁹³ *Şuhba* was one of the fundamental means by which people acquired their useful loyalties. *Şuhba* was also the basis of the temporary scholarly factions that were the critical groups of the learned.⁹⁴

Young people became shaykhs through the *şuhba* of a single shaykh and his disciples, just as a mamlūk entered the *şuhba* of his ustādh.⁹⁵ The follower of a

⁹⁰ For an example of one civilian who entered the *şuhba* of al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam ʻIsā, see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 646. For a shaykh in the *şuhba* of an amīr: Ibn Shākir, 21/63–4; Yūnīnī, 3/106. For an amīr in the *şuhba* of shaykhs see Ṣafadī, A‘yān, 121a. A shaykh could be both *şahib* and *sadiq* or friend to another: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāṭ*, 8/718; Yūnīnī, 3/136. *Şuhba* as a bond between shaykhs: one shaykh reported that “I went to him again and again because of the *şuhba* that was between us”: Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6/228.

⁹¹ Ibn Shākir, 21/243–4. ⁹² Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāṭ*, 8/689. ⁹³ Yūnīnī, 4/151.

⁹⁴ For *şuhba* as a scholarly faction defined by its loyalty to a single individual see the fate of Manbijī’s *şuhba* after the death of Baybars in Ibn Kathīr, 14/57, and of ʻAbd al-Ghanī Ibn Qudāma’s *şuhba*, who suffered during the fitna surrounding his trial: Ibn Rajab, 2/19. For a scholar who attained a high position (*rutba ʻaliyya*) by virtue of his *şuhba* of a shaykh see Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6/44.

⁹⁵ For an example of how people became learned through the initiatory power of *şuhba*, see Yūnīnī, 3/203: “*şahiba jamā‘a mina l-‘ulāmā w’al-mashāyakh*.” According to Ibn Jamā‘a, the point of residing in a mudrāsa was *muşâhaba al-fuḍalā*: Ibn Jamā‘a, 220. Medical education was also conceived of as *şuhba*: see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 637.

shaykh was his *şâhib*, and group loyalties were understood as *şuhba*.⁹⁶ To Damascenes, *şuhba* created loyalties more intimate and useful than the formal group affiliations they may have had. The *şuhbas* of famous shaykhs, for example, cut across madhhab lines.⁹⁷ When the sons of the *ā'yān* encountered scholars brought in from outside the city, they forged and sanctified their ties through *şuhba*.⁹⁸ Some considered *şuhba* to be exclusive, as was the case of the shaykh who forbade his disciples (*murīds*) to enter the *şuhba* of anyone else, for fear that they might be endangered.⁹⁹

What unites these various practices is that they engendered loyalties among elites who otherwise had few useful ties to one another. *Ā'yān* and *amīrs* alike both faced the problem of constructing alliances in a society that was considerably more monetized than the Latin West, one in which wealth, power, and status were constantly reshuffled. The elites of Damascus made social and political use of such household ties. These ties had their origins in the patriarchal household, but they were also strategies by which a resourceful elite formed its critical groups. Thus within the domain of knowledge civilians acquired loyalties similar to those the military realized in the domains of war and *fitna*.

Imitation

'Ilm, the sources repeat again and again, was a form of *baraka*, and as with other sources of *baraka*, Damascenes of all types labored to acquire it. Some among the learned were objects of popular practices for the incorporation of *baraka*. Damascenes seeking “benefit” and *baraka* drank the water in which Ibn Taymiyya did his ablutions; and after his death some vied to drink the water with which his corpse was washed.¹⁰⁰ Another example was the wealthy Damascene who acquired 'Abd al-Ghanī Ibn Qudāma's robe, intending to use it as his own burial shroud. People who fell ill or suffered headaches wore the robe and were cured by its *baraka*.¹⁰¹ Use of such objects for their *baraka* was little different from other widely practiced ways of seeking useful grace.

Young people became disciples of their shaykhs for the *baraka* to be gained from them and to imitate them to gain exemplarity. The jurists who wrote our

⁹⁶ For example, see the lecturer who dropped his *mansabs* and entered the *şuhba* of the antinomian *hārafish*: Ibn Kathir 13/314.

⁹⁷ Ibn Rajab, 2/95. For Ḥanbalis, Ḥanafis, and Mālikis joining the other followers of an esteemed Shāfi'i shaykh, see Ṣafadi, *al-Wāfi*, 21/341.

⁹⁸ This was true of Ibn 'Asākir's relationship to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, and of 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Qalānī's relationship to Tāj al-Dīn al-Kindī, both of which were relationships of *şuhba* between sons of established families and scholars brought in by rulers. 'Izz al-Dīn's relationship to al-Kindī was described thus: “*şâhibâ* shaykhnâ Tāj al-Dīn wa-kâna mulâziman lahu w'antafa'a bih”. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'ât*, 8/631.

⁹⁹ He cautioned his followers: “The patient consults a single physician, who prescribes medicine for him, and if another physician were also to participate in caring for him it might lead to the death of the patient”: Yūnīnī, 4/79.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥādi, Kōp. MS, 133; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/76 of the Cairo 1951 edition.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Rajab, 2/27.

sources advised young people to submit themselves to their shaykhs and to model themselves consciously after them. Learned people advised the young to model themselves not just on the moral and intellectual example of their shaykhs, but also on the shaykhs' "ḥarakāt wa-sukna," or "movements and stillnesses," words which in this instance as in others echoed the vowelizing of texts ("harakāt wa-sukūn").¹⁰² To ʿAhmad Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wāṣiṭī, "the student must love guidance, as the teacher must love to guide. This condition is legally binding on them."¹⁰³ Ibn Jamā'a wrote that in relation to their shaykhs, students should be "as the sick man is to the expert physician."¹⁰⁴ He wrote his book of advice to the young partly to affirm the mimetic character of their ties to their shaykhs, quoting with approval one of the companions of the Prophet: "O my son, cleave to the 'ulamā' and the fuqahā', and learn from them and acquire their adab; for that is preferable to me than your learning many ḥadīth."¹⁰⁵ One reason that writers reassured the young that they should not be too troubled by errors their shaykhs committed was to put the importance of the imitation of shaykhs over and above the knowledge their shaykhs conveyed. Wherever the shaykh points the student, there the student should follow, and set aside his own opinion, "for the error of the guide (murshid) is more beneficial than being correct himself – as was the case with Moses and Khidr. In spite of Moses' great rank he kept silent."¹⁰⁶ The shaykh was as much a model of bodily norms as he was a carrier of truths. Training of the self and shaping its presentation was an important part of the capital of young people: adab was "the inheritance of the prophets," by which they "attained the first rank."¹⁰⁷

When dealing with pre-modern agrarian societies, historians are apt to give tradition a large role in explaining cultural practices. And there is no doubt that in Damascus the imitation of cultural exemplars was one of the critical social practices of the city's elites. Yet despite their frequent invocation of the past, what is striking about the greatest shaykhs is the frequency with which writers praised their inventiveness and individual virtuosity. Exemplary shaykhs were carefully scrutinized, and their slightest deviation from established practice was noted and queried. When Ibrāhīm Ibn ʿAbd al-Wāḥid went to the mosque, his concern for ritual purity was as inventive as it was scrupulous: "Whenever he pulled a hair from his beard, or whatever he picked from his nose, he put it in his turban; whenever he sharpened a reed-pen, he was careful that the shavings did not fall." When he discovered a spot of dust

¹⁰² "The student must support his teacher during his life, and look after his relatives and loved ones after his death, and undertake the visiting of his tomb . . . and follow his path (yaslik maslakahu), and preserve his way in 'ilm and dīn, and be guided by his movements and his stillnesses (ḥarakāt wa-sukna) in his customs and manner of worship, and adopt his adab, and never abandon being guided by it"; Ibn Jamā'a, 90.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādi, Köp. MS, 113.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Jamā'a, 87. For another example of the fairly common association of the shaykh with the physician, see Ibn al-Hājj, 1/117. For another reading of these passages by Ibn Jamā'a, see Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 36–9.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Jamā'a, 2. ¹⁰⁶ Ibn Jamā'a, 88. ¹⁰⁷ Ibn Jamā'a, 2.

on his robe in the mosque, he would depart to clean it off. In prayer, Ibrāhīm raised his voice during the takbīr, contrary to the local practice. When an onlooker pointed out to him that the local practice followed the example of the Prophet and gave a ḥadīth as evidence for his view, Ibrāhīm countered with a ḥadīth of his own which seemed to support his way of doing things.¹⁰⁸

Ibrāhīm's transgression cast him paradoxically as an arbiter of the practices by which the a‘yān gained their distinction. This standing outside the rules appears again and again in the biographies of the learned men of the city. Through such epigrammatic gestures the a‘yān gained distinction not by imitating cultural forms but by gently transgressing them, thereby casting themselves as arbiters of the ordinary rules of interaction. Shaykhs did not duplicate an unchanging body of cultural forms. Rather, they struggled to acquire a sense of deportment that allowed them to manipulate these apparently fixed cultural forms gracefully and naturally, much as athletes or musicians repeat single movements in ever-changing situations. Also like athletes and musicians, they lauded unexpected virtuosity in the use of an apparently invariable “tradition.”¹⁰⁹

Mastery of the text so that it could be produced instantly and faultlessly from memory, and the constant companionship and service of the shaykh, had a similar object. The goal was virtuosity and what we would call “naturalness” in public performances, as much as trained competence in specific fields of knowledge. This may be why praise of deftness in difficult and unexpected situations was such a constant refrain, and why error-free ease in public performances was so highly valued.¹¹⁰ Memory and imitation had, and were put to, similar uses.

The advantage in this kind of initiation went to those exposed to great

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Rajab, 2/98.

¹⁰⁹ For other examples of such virtuosity, see Nawawī's apparently eccentric refusal to eat fruit or enter a bath, which he justified in a similar manner: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Tabaqāt*, 4/256–7; also the shaykh who fasted only on the sixth of Shawwāl and who wore the clothing and cap he slept in to prayers at the mosque, “astonishing the common people.” He transgressed his own norms by wearing the ṭaylasān during the procession of the sultān through the city, “astonishing” his son and justifying it by similar unassailable counter-intuitive logic: Subki, *Tabaqāt*, 6/173–4. Other examples: Abū Shāma lauded Ibn ‘Asākir for “his own characteristic manner” of reading fatwās: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 37. A noted shaykh never changed his cotton robe or turban: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/82. A pious and famous shaykh, when standing in the mihrāb of a masjid, thrice demanded that those in attendance depart and perform their ablutions: Jazārī, BN MS, 369–70. A shaykh refused to eat or to speak to anyone until after the evening prayer: Jazārī, BN MS, 505–6. A shaykh would spend the night at the head of John the Baptist in the Umayyad Mosque, and at dawn went home with his clogs in his hand: Jazārī, BN MS, 195. See also Subki, Staatsbibliothek MS, 46 on an eccentric style of writing.

¹¹⁰ For examples of the praise of virtuosity displayed through writing, lecturing, or memorizing effortlessly and quickly, or speaking and quoting without preparation, see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 208; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 131; Yūnīnī, 2/55–6; Nu‘aymī, 1/250; Subki, *Tabaqāt*, 5/14, 6/170, 200, 201; Ibn Kathīr, 14/46; Ibn Rajab, 2/91; Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, Köp. MS, 3. The effect of such displays of memory on their audiences can be seen in a typical reaction of an onlooker to one: “I couldn't control my astonishment at what I saw”: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/159.

shaykhs at young ages. It was also why lineages able to pass on ‘ilm to their offspring had such an advantage in imparting to them the whole package of signs and emblems associated with knowledge. The ideal was something like the early life of the Ibn Taymiyya, who was “raised in the best way, in the rooms of the ‘ulamā’, drinking from the cups of understanding, cavorting in the fields of learning (tafaqquh) and in the trees of books.”¹¹¹ Fathers also reinforced what their offspring learned from shaykhs. Subkī described how his father encouraged his discipleship of Mizzi, with whom the father had long associated. “Whenever I came home from a meeting with Mizzi, my father would say, ‘you have arrived home from the shaykh.’ He would explain the shaykh’s expressions in a loud voice, and I am certain that he did so because he wanted to fix [Mizzi’s] greatness in my heart and encourage me in [my] discipleship.”¹¹²

The ritualization of knowledge

As with the ritual practices of many other societies, the cultivation of knowledge joined together fundamental oppositions and correspondences in a sanctified space and time.¹¹³ The biographical dictionaries convey numerous examples of the majlis al-‘ilm uniting the inner and the outer, the individual and the collective, the origin and the outcome, the ritually pure and the true.

Damascenes together with many other medieval Middle Eastern peoples imagined the world as polarized between purity and pollution. Purity was associated with the sunna, truth, moral conduct, good government, the boundaries of the community of Muslims, the absence of fitna (itself conceived as pollution), and the social honor of elites.¹¹⁴ Shaykhs tested all vehicles of baraka for ritual purity, and guarded them against pollution. Shaykhs ordered nursing women not to eat ḥarām foods, lest children lose the “baraka of the milk.”¹¹⁵ As the literate elite looked to ‘ilm as their prime source of baraka, they cared for it as they cared for other sacred substances, and protected the purity of its vehicles of transmission.

The conflation of ‘ilm and purity caused shaykhs to describe transactions of knowledge in the same terms as other ritual transactions that demanded

¹¹¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, Kōp. MS, 3. ¹¹² Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/253.

¹¹³ For a review of social science literature on ritual see C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, 1992).

¹¹⁴ Examples of how the world was imagined in terms of purity and pollution include the association of scholarly fitna with pollution: Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 9; the conflation of the sunna with purity: Ibn al-Hājj, 2/87, Ibn al-Salāh, *Fatāwā*, 1/401–2; the prayer (*du’ā*) to “purify our tongues from lies”: Ibn Rajab, 2/100; God “purified” all of Syria: Qalqashandī, 12/22, as Damascus under a good ruler was “pure”; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāt*, 8/740, and a good ruler “purified” his realm: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāt*, 8/595; Nu‘aymī, 1/610. Muslims were “the partisans of God (*al-ḥaqqa*) who . . . are purified”: Qalqashandī, 12/353, as Franks were polluting: Ibn al-Šuqāṭī, 12–13. On the association of purity with social honor see Yūnīnī, 2/56. Appointments from the sultān were seen as pollutions: Ibn Kathīr, 14/43, 109.

¹¹⁵ Ibn al-Hājj, 4/295.

purity: “Just as prayer – which is the [form of] worship of the external body (‘ibāda al-jawārih al-zāhira) – is not valid until after the purification of the exterior from pollution . . . If the heart is made ready for ‘ilm, then its baraka will appear and it will increase as the plowed earth will produce and thrive; if it be corrupted, then the body will be corrupted in its entirety.”¹¹⁶ At Ibn Taymiyya’s Friday morning session in Qur’ān interpretation, those in attendance benefited from the “baraka of his prayer (du‘ā) and the purity of his person (tahāra anfāsihi) . . . the purity of his exterior and interior (wa ṣafā zāhirihi wa-bātinihi), and the agreement of his words and deeds.”¹¹⁷ Similarly, in the transmission of ḥadīth, the ḥadīth-transmitter was told both to be in a state of ritual purity and to “purify his heart from worldly ambitions and their pollutions (aghraq ad-dunyāwiyya w’adnāsuhā).”¹¹⁸ A particularly pious shaykh could be known as a *muṭahhur* – one who purifies by his very presence.¹¹⁹

Objects used in the transmission of ‘ilm excited some of the ritual fastidiousness that ritual objects inspired. As the shaykh giving the dars should attain a state of ritual purity, so books, ink, and paper transmitting ‘ilm were to be made of pure materials. Writers advised booksellers to inquire into the probity of people they purchased books from, to protect the “purity” (*tahāra*) of the buyers. They were not to sell or buy books to or from anyone who contradicted the shari‘a.¹²⁰ These writers also advised copyists to perform ablutions before copying.¹²¹ Inks were to be made from ritually pure materials.¹²² Shaykhs also worried about the purity of paper. They promised that copyists fastidious about obtaining unpolluted writing materials would gain a reward in the afterlife (*thawāb*) and baraka.¹²³ One mid-seventh-century fatwā addressed the question whether paper-makers could use the ashes of polluted substances to dry paper in the manufacturing process.¹²⁴ Another writer advised copyists to ensure that their paper was not made in enterprises in which workers “uncovered their private parts,” as workers often wore a kind of loincloth which “failed the demands of modesty.”¹²⁵ Moreover, writers advised copyists to be careful not to purchase recycled paper that had once contained sacred texts or the names of prophets, angels, the companions of the prophets, or the ‘ulamā’. Paper that had sacred things written on it was not to be pulped again, because it would either end up underfoot while being pulped or be overwritten.

As the learned considered themselves vessels of ‘ilm, they admonished one

¹¹⁶ Ibn Jamā‘a, 67. ¹¹⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥādī, *Tabaqāt*, 4/286.

¹¹⁸ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 359, 363.

¹¹⁹ Birzālī, *Mu‘jam al-shuyūkh*, Zāhiriyah MS, 21a. ¹²⁰ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 4/80.

¹²¹ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 4/85. For a similar sentiment, see Ibn Jamā‘a, 173: “If one copies a portion of a book in fiqh, then one must be in a state of purity as if ready for prayer (mustaqbal al-qibla), pure of body and of robe, with pure ink (bi-hibr tāhir).” Of course, that jurists associated the transmission of ‘ilm with ritual purity did not mean that they succeeded. See al-Nāsikh al-Fārisī, whose passion for the grape – “he did not depart from it for even an hour” – did not interfere with his reputation as a copyist: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/759.

¹²² Ibn al-Ḥājj, 4/89; Ibn Jamā‘a, 173. ¹²³ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 4/82.

¹²⁴ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Fatāwā*, 1/222–3. ¹²⁵ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 4/81–2.

another to be alert to the dangers of pollution. Even though the *‘ulamā’* were not a closed caste of Brahmins, some occupations degraded them through something like pollution: “The learned man should keep away from the basest professions, because they are despicable according to both revelation and custom, such as the art of cupping (*hijāma*), dyeing, money changing, and gold-smithing.”¹²⁶ Writers advised young people and their shaykhs to attain a state of ritual purity before transmitting *‘ilm*: “The student should enter into the shaykh’s presence in a state of ritual perfection (*kāmil al-hay’ā*) pure of body and of dress (*muṭahhar al-badan w’ath-thiyāb*) . . . especially when a student goes into a majlis al-*‘ilm*.¹²⁷ So too the shaykh: “When a learned man decides to hold a lecture, he should purify himself from pollution (*al-ḥadath w’al-ḥabath*) . . . by way of exalting *‘ilm* and the *sharī’ā*.¹²⁸

When writers associated *‘ilm* with purity, this was just one way they conceived of the cultivation of *‘ilm* as a ritual practice. As the learned compared *‘ilm* to prayer, so they associated the transmission of knowledge with other collective liminal experiences.¹²⁹ Ibn Jamā‘a quoted a *ḥadīth* that made one such explicit link: “He who would wish to know the character of the audiences of the prophets, let him look to the audiences of the learned.”¹³⁰ The first lecture was said to be the teaching of the Qur’ān, either *talqīnān* (one-to-one “inculcation,” a term associated with the transmission of knowledge [*ma’rifa*] among *ṣūfīs* and with memorization more broadly) or on a paper or board.¹³¹ The lecture itself was a partly ritual occasion, one that “provided *baraka*” to its audience.¹³² Ibn al-Ḥājj provides the most detailed description of the lecture from the period. His descriptions were prescriptive in ways we find difficult to fathom; at the very least, he intended to criticize the practices of other legal schools and what he saw as the corruptions of his time. But from him we can at least learn how these practices were valorized as socially useful cultural ideals, if not how the actual practices were in all cases played out. Ibn al-Ḥājj’s description of the dars is worth quoting at some length, not only because it is the most detailed description of the dars available, but also because he demonstrates how some among the learned elite sought to associate one of their critical rituals with the sacred power of other rituals:

When the Qur’ān-reciter finishes, [the lecturer] is to recite the *fātiḥā* [the first verse in the Qur’ān], taking refuge thereby from Satan, protecting the audience from his evil in the audience. Then God should be named, because Satan abandons everything that begins

¹²⁶ Ibn Jamā‘a, 19; see also R. Brunschwig, “Métiers vils dans l’Islam,” *SI* 16 (1967), 41–60.

¹²⁷ Ibn Jamā‘a, 95.

¹²⁸ Ibn Jamā‘a, 30. See Jazarī, BN MS, 375, for a majlis known for its purity; also Safadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/63 for a sixth-century shaykh in Marwarūdh renowned for never giving a dars except in a state of purity: “kāna lā yulqīd-dars ilā ‘alā’-t-tahāra.”

¹²⁹ For one association of *‘ilm* to prayer see Ibn Jamā‘a, 64: the *faḍīla* of *‘ilm* is superior (*afḍal*) to prayer in a Friday mosque; by it the *sharaf* (nobility or eminence) of the world and the hereafter is acquired. ¹³⁰ Ibn Jamā‘a, 11. ¹³¹ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1/94.

¹³² See for one example Ibn Khalīkān, 2/374. A very typical account of a visit to a study-circle mentioned the baraka obtained in it: “I happened to attend a study-circle he presided over, and experienced his baraka as something amazing (*jalastu ‘indahu fi ḥalqa marāran fa-wajadtu min barakatihi shay’ azīm*)”: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 5/11.

with the naming of God, and his presence is banned. Then [he should] pray for the Prophet because it will bring baraka to his audience. Then he should express his satisfaction with the companions [of the Prophet], because they are the foundation upon which all is built. Then he should say *lā ḥawl wa-lā quwwa illā lillah* three times, or seven if possible, as the correct among the ‘ulamā’ do. Then he should consign his affairs to God and put his trust in his guidance (*yatawakkul*). He should . . . clear his mind of all [the fruits of] his knowledge, understanding, studying, and conversations – so that now [it is as though] he knows nothing. If God were to reveal some knowledge to him, it is from God, and not from his own past reading, studying, and thinking. He should ask the aid of God in avoiding slips of the tongue, the insinuations of Satan, and mistakes and corruptions. Then he should discourse on whatever knowledge he has acquired concerning the issue that the Qur’ān-reciter has read. He should cover what the ‘ulamā’ have said on the matter. He should survey their doctrines, and then he should go over the foundations in the Qur’ān and the sunna upon which they constructed their judgments. When he discusses the ‘ulamā’, he should be gentle and express satisfaction with them. He should also discourse on the ‘ulamā’ according to their rank, virtue, and precedence. As *Abū Ḥanīfa* said, “relating stories about the learned and sitting in attendance upon them (*mujālasatihim*) is preferable to me than much learning (*fīqh*), because they represent the *adab* of the people and their morals too.” Then he should advance the position of his school and support it, on condition that he refrain from partisanship [by imputing] error to authorities not of his school. For example, if you are a *Mālikī* do not permit the defects of *al-Shāfi’ī* or other authorities to register with you. They are the physicians of your religion. Whenever something in religion gets crooked, they fix it. When you fall into error they have the medicine to cure you. Physicians have various courses of treatment. When you go to a physician and get from him a course of treatment, this does not mean that you despise other physicians.¹³³

The learned associated themselves with other forms of ritual power by linking their ‘ilm to šūfism. One way they did this was by casting themselves as “true” šūfis or *ahl al-dhikr*.¹³⁴ The learned elite were often šūfis themselves, and identified with šūfism in a number of ways, but they still competed with šūfis for the capacity to represent ‘ilm.¹³⁵ When *Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī*

¹³³ *Ibn al-Ḥājj*, 1/115–17. For similar advice concerning sessions of ḥadīth transmission see *Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*, *Muqaddima*, 363–7.

¹³⁴ *Ibn al-Ḥājj*, 1/89: “It is the ‘ulama’ who are meant by the term *ahl al-dhikr* by the Qur’ānic verse, ‘if you do not know something, ask the *ahl al-dhikr*’”. He also quoted a ḥadīth: “Sitting in attendance upon learned men is preferable to God than a thousand years of worship (‘ibāda).”

¹³⁵ This competition went both ways, as šūfis appropriated the authority of ‘ilm and the learned tried to appropriate the immediacy and significance of šūfi ma’rifā. Šūfis themselves had a long tradition of associating ma’rifā with ‘ilm. Qushayrī for example said that every ‘ilm was a ma’rifā and every ma’rifā an ‘ilm, and every ‘ārif (i.e. šūfi) was an ‘alim: Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 166. Al-Sarāj called šūfism the “‘ilm al-bāṭin” (Rosenthal, 181), and ‘ilm itself was experienced as a kind of ‘ishq, a physical love felt for the divine (Rosenthal, 241, quoting *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*’s *Rawda al-Muhibbin*). Rosenthal, 177, wrote that šūfis “tried very strenuously to appear as a ‘science’ as well as keep in step with the various scientific views of the meaning of knowledge.” *Ibn al-Ḥājj* tried to associate the dars with the liminality of šūfi dhikr and the majlis of the Prophet, while keeping the subject matter devoted to fiqh: “The majlis of ‘ilm should be a majlis of the permitted and forbidden (*halāl* and the *ḥarām*, i.e., its

enumerated in a poem the various fields of knowledge, he related to his readers that the object of learning was “to seek by your ‘ilm the face of God.”¹³⁶ Some argued that the cultivation of ‘ilm was a collective invocation of God (dhikr) similar to worship (*‘ibāda*), or to other occasions in which baraka was to be gained.¹³⁷ This association of ‘ilm with worship and baraka was partly to compete with šūfism, by demonstrating that the ‘ilm of the ‘ulamā’ was “true” knowledge, and that the ritual cultivation of ‘ilm rivaled the liminality of šūfi dhikr. The learned advised young people to imagine the lecture as a ritual occasion similar to the dhikr: “The student must empty his heart of all corruption, impurity (*danas*), envy, and false belief in order to receive knowledge, remember it, and be able to meditate on its meanings and the depths of its truth. Knowledge – as someone has said – is the prayer of the innermost self (*ṣalā as-sirr*), and the worship of the heart (*‘ibāda al-qalb*), and the vehicle of the inner truth (*qurba al-bāṭin*).”¹³⁸

An anecdote related by Ibn al-Ḥājj illustrates the association of patrimony, knowledge, and the ritual character of the majlis al-‘ilm. After the Prophet’s death, Abū Hurayra went to the market and “announced to the people that the estate of the prophet was to be divided in the mosque, so the people left the market and went to the mosque. Inside they discovered people learning the Qur’ān and ḥadīth, and the ḥalāl and the ḥarām [the permitted and the forbidden, i.e., law]. So they said to Abū Hurayra: ‘Where is what you mentioned?’ He replied: ‘This is the estate of the prophets; they leave behind them not a dirham nor a dinar, rather they leave behind ‘ilm.’ Religion is the remembrance (dhikr) of God through one’s knowledge of the ḥalāl and the ḥarām; this is preferable to the dhikr of the tongue.”¹³⁹

It was not only formal occasions such as the dars or the majlis al-‘ilm that were experienced as liminal moments. Many banal interactions between students and shaykhs were ritualized and scripted: “When the student enters into the company of the shaykh, or sits with him, he should have his mind free from preoccupations (*shawāghul*) and his mind should be pure, untroubled by anxieties, drowsiness, anger or strong hunger or thirst, in order that his breast may be open to what is said, and that he may heed what he hears.”¹⁴⁰ Advice to young people prescribed the proper attitude of the student in the presence of the shaykh, hedging in the majlis al-‘ilm with numerous restrictions:

Do not look at anything but the teacher, and do not turn around to investigate any sound, especially during discussion. Do not shake your sleeve. The student should not uncover his arms, nor should he fiddle with his hands or feet or any part of his body

subject matter should be law); determining what is permitted and forbidden, recommended or despised, in such areas as prayer, sex, ablutions, and commerce, through close textual study, including parsing the text correctly. This is the way things were in Madina”: Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1/87.

¹³⁶ Subki, Staatsbibliothek MS, 31.

¹³⁷ Ibn Jamā‘a, 95. Transmission of ḥadīth was conceived as an occasion in which collective baraka was to be gained: “[One aspect of the] baraka of ḥadīth is that [its transmitters] benefit one another (*min baraka al-ḥadīth ifadatu ba‘dihim ba‘d*)”: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 370.

¹³⁸ Ibn Jamā‘a, 67. ¹³⁹ Ibn al-Ḥājj, 1/87. ¹⁴⁰ Ibn Jamā‘a, 96.

parts, nor should he place his hand on his beard or his mouth, or pick his nose or play with it, or open his mouth, or gnash his teeth. He should not lean against a wall, or a cushion, or put his hand against [them] in the presence of his shaykh; nor should he turn his back or his flank to his shaykh, nor should he sit on his hands, nor should he speak too much without need, nor should he try to say anything funny or offensive; and he should not laugh except out of surprise. If something overcomes him he should smile without giving voice. He should not clear his throat unnecessarily, nor should he spit if he can help it, nor should he drool, but should wipe his expectorate on his sleeve or in a scarf. If he sneezes he should try to do it quietly and cover his face with a handkerchief, and if he should yawn he should cover his mouth after first trying to fight it off. It is a sign of respect to the shaykh not to sit between him and the direction of prayer, nor to his side, nor on a cushion.¹⁴¹

Similarly, in ḥadīth audiences, seekers after ḥadīth should not speak to the ḥadīth-transmitter; nor should the session be allowed to last long, otherwise the “benefit” of the session was lost.¹⁴² These prescriptions went beyond school-rules or proper etiquette; they were also a means of making young people conscious of themselves as they entered the partly sacred space around the shaykh. Within this space, students were encouraged to think of themselves as ritually polluting: “The student should not let his hand or foot or any part of his body or his clothing touch the clothing of the shaykh or his cushion or his prayer rug . . . the student should not sit in the presence of the shaykh on [his] prayer rug (*sajāda*) nor pray on it if the place is pure (*ṭāhir*).”¹⁴³ These are just a few examples of the admonitions, restrictions, and prohibitions that governed the relationship of the young person to the shaykh. One effect of these admonitions was to ritualize the space around the shaykh and his followers, and to bring their interactions outside ordinary time.

Reversal and transgression

One way of understanding the ritualized character of the transmission of knowledge is by examining how the ‘ilm and adab of the learned were adopted by others. Although the a‘yān often punished severely transgressions of their control over ‘ilm and the adab associated with it, a group of marginal holy men known as the *muwallahīn* lampooned their dominance with impunity. They achieved fame, and avoided repression, even when they subverted the rituals, performances, and idioms of purity of the learned.

One of the most famous of the *muwallahīn* was Yūsuf al-Qamīnī (d. 657/1259). Yūsuf had a particularly ribald version of the ‘ilm and adab of the learned elite. As the learned were noted for their attention to purity, Yūsuf lived on or in the refuse heap of Nūr al-Dīn’s hospital, wore clothes stained with dirt, urinated in his robes, and used little water. Where the learned marked their status by large turbans and wide sleeves of fine cloth, Yūsuf went

¹⁴¹ Ibn Jamā‘a, 98–100. ¹⁴² Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 369. ¹⁴³ Ibn Jamā‘a, 108–9.

bare-headed and let his sleeves drop, “giving a bizarre effect.” Where the learned were known for discoursing endlessly, Yūsuf was famous for his long silences. Where learned men exerted themselves to adopt a moderate gait, of Yūsuf it was said that “one of the world’s great oddities is that he would stagger in his gait, without running into anyone, and not care.”¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, the common people (‘awāmm) and others described as his “followers” esteemed him, not just as a typical holy man, but because “he made things clear to them.”¹⁴⁵ “The people (*an-nās*),” recounted Jazārī, “believed that he was righteous (*salāh*), and spoke of his marvels and wonders (‘ajā’ib wa-gharā’ib), and [believed that] his mind was sound (‘aqlahu thābit).”¹⁴⁶ He also healed the sick whom physicians had failed.¹⁴⁷ Abū Shāma, who lived near the hospital and probably would have encountered him frequently, said he “benefited us.”¹⁴⁸ Yūsuf’s transgressions were often as striking as those of others who suffered terrible punishments. However, he was paradoxically an object of much esteem from the common people, and even from the a‘yān.

Others were described as holding counter-performances of the rituals of the elite on dunghills and garbage heaps and wearing polluted clothing. Ibrāhīm Ibn Sa‘id al-Shāhūrī (d. 680/1281–2) either sat or held majālis in polluted substances, and wore clothing from which polluted substances (najasāt) had been brushed off but not washed, meaning that according to Islamic law it remained polluted. He supposedly never prayed or purified himself from pollution. He had a large following among “the ‘awāmm and those who do not reason.”¹⁴⁹ The sources accused him of “mental confusion” without citing any examples of what he said, so we do not know what was simultaneously so compelling as to attract crowds and so innocuous as to spare him from persecution. But it is clear that many did not see him as a marginal individual or madman.¹⁵⁰ On a more modest level, Izz al-Dīn al-Irbilī, a philosopher on the sidelines of the struggle for manṣabs, was known for criticizing the a‘yān and flaunting polluting substances.¹⁵¹

Marginal or insane people became famous for reversing the normal order of things. Ḥasan al-Kurdī (d. 724/1324), known for wearing polluted substances and walking barefoot, spoke what one sceptical source described as “mindless drivel” (*hadhayānāt*), but which he acknowledged resembled a form of esoteric

¹⁴⁴ The most detailed study of the muwallahīn in the context of the religious history of the city is L. Pouzet, *Damas*, 222–32. On Yūsuf al-Qamīnī (possibly Iqmīnī in Damascene dialect; his niṣba means “of the stokehold” after the stokehold of the baths at the Nūriyya bimāristān) see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 202–3; Yūnīnī, 1/348; Ibn Kathīr, 13/216–17, 298; C.E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld. The Banū Sasān in Arabic Society and Literature* (Leiden, 1976), vol. 1, 121–2.

¹⁴⁵ Yūnīnī, 1/348. Ibn Kathīr accepted that Yūsuf had knowledge of the unseen, but criticized the willingness of people to follow him, as such knowledge “has its source in possession by jinn,” Ibn Kathīr, 13/216–17. ¹⁴⁶ Jazārī, *Gotha Ducale* MS 1559, year 657. ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 203. ¹⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr, 13/298.

¹⁵⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 13/217, 298; Ibn Shākir, 21/297–8; Yūnīnī, 4/100.

¹⁵¹ Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/362–3.

knowledge (*‘ilm al-mughayyabāt*) that gained him some disciples.¹⁵² Similarly, Aḥmad Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Maqdīsī (d. 710/1310–11), one of the Banū Qudāma, had a conventional religious education, then after “a defect entered his mind,” he stood in the road, “reciting useful things, and relating things new and old,” and mixing “the serious with the frivolous.”¹⁵³ Ibn Ḥajar and Ṣafadī related that he had disciples (talāmidha) while he was in this state.¹⁵⁴ Another of the Banū Qudāma, Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān, interpreted visions and dreams, and produced miracles.¹⁵⁵ Ibn Taymiyya was quoted as saying that a jinn followed Aḥmad around (“lahu ṭābi‘ mina’l-jinn”) and prompted him with esoteric knowledge. In spite of the unorthodox character of his *‘ilm*, which exposed him to suspicion, he successfully cast himself as a learned shaykh. He was known as a man with ḥurma and lectured in the Jawziyya madrasa without recorded interference. In contrast to other carriers of esoteric knowledge, he wrote a book about his *‘ilm*.

Some of the common people saw the knowledge and manners of these marginal people as a meaningful usurpation of the *‘ilm* and *adab* of the learned elite. The common people treated the muwallahīn as powerful patrons treated great shaykhs. The common people “loved and honored” Ibrāhīm Ibn Sa‘īd (aḥabbahu w’akramahu), the usual formula for the favor of a man with power for a shaykh or amīr. The common people also gave him the kind of well-attended funeral that was usually accorded great scholars and amīrs. They had a carved headstone made for him and built over it a small mausoleum decorated with some of the architectural details of the major madrasas and dār al-ḥadīths, including a mihrāb and muqarnas.¹⁵⁶ They also gave Yūsuf al-Qamīnī a decorated tomb with a carved headstone, and a group of them remained by the tomb reciting the Qur’ān, thereby casting him in death in the role of the founders of the great tomb-foundations.¹⁵⁷ This tomb, in which others of the muwallahīn were buried, became known as *Sayyidī sh-shaykh Yūsuf al-Iqmīnī*, or the *turba al-muwallahīn*.

What these figures had in common was not just their prestige, but their apparent immunity from persecution. Some writers associated their *‘ilm* with insanity, consumption of ḥashīsh, or possession by jinn, but the learned elite never silenced them.¹⁵⁸ There is little evidence that they tried. Ibn Kathīr was one of the few writers who was generally scornful of these figures. Of

¹⁵² Ibn Kathīr, 14/116.

¹⁵³ “Kāna yaqīfu fi ṭ-ṭuruq wa-yunshidu ashyā’ a mufida, wa-yaḥkī ashyā’ a qadīma wa-jadīda”: Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, 22b.

¹⁵⁴ “Wa-lahu talāmidha fi tilka’l-ḥal”: Ibn Ḥajar, 1/81; Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, 22b.

¹⁵⁵ Ibn Shākir, 1/86–88; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/84; Ibn Rajab, 2/336. ¹⁵⁶ Ibn Kathīr, 13/298.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Kathīr, 13/217, 298. Sahar von Schlegell has told me that the tomb was maintained by the Nabulusi family until the mid-twentieth century, when its guardian built an apartment building on it.

¹⁵⁸ See the case of Ḥasan al-Kurdī, who supposedly had a jinn who followed him around and spoke through him: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mīrāt*, 8/638. Another marginal type named ‘Alī al-Kurdī (d. 631) was also said by some to have been used by jinn and by others to have knowledge of the unseen: Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 117. Ibn Kathīr also attributed Yūsuf al-Qamīnī’s *‘ilm* to the insinuations of jinn: Ibn Kathīr, 13/216. For accusations of insanity see the accusation that Aḥmad Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Maqdīsī had a “defect” (inḥirāf) in Ibn Ḥajar,

Sulaymān al-Turkmānī (d. 714/1314–15), he said that “one of the riff-raff (*al-hamaj*) had a teaching (*aqīda*) about him, suitable for the low-lifes who follow everyone who caws like a bird. They believed that he revealed the unseen (*yukāshīfū*) and was a decent man.”¹⁵⁹ However, Ibn Kathīr’s hostility was largely absent in more contemporary sources.

What accounts for the absence of any recorded attempt to suppress or silence these marginal people? Several possibilities suggest themselves. First, even though they claimed to possess a form of *‘ilm*, they neither challenged the learned elite’s control over the production of knowledge nor struggled for their honors or status. By virtue of their pollution, they were ineligible for mansabs, and their clownishness could then be tolerated even by very grave men. Second, the ribaldries of these marginal individuals had much in common with the rituals of reversal and transgression seen in many other pre-industrial societies. Such reversals, by inverting the normal order, paradoxically often serve to affirm it. The ribald performers seen on the margins of many pre-modern societies often enjoyed a kind of immunity as a result.¹⁶⁰ Finally, the learned elite lauded these marginal people in language they usually reserved for *ṣūfīs* and holy men, describing their careers as ascetic athleticism, “holding to a path (*ṭarīqa*) hard on the self.”¹⁶¹

Even if some among the elite regarded these people as possessed, there were few practices by which elite groups could diagnose, segregate, and silence the insane. There were also fewer reasons to do so than we have today. It is likely that to many of their audiences these men worked new meanings out of cultural practices usually controlled by the *a‘yān*. These were people who transformed the performances, truths, and texts of the learned into productions that were equally significant but that had different meanings and audiences. By bringing meaning and the social order into temporary congruity – however ribald that correspondence was – they affirmed the relationship of *‘ilm* to the social order, masked the *a‘yān*’s control over the production of knowledge, and gained their acceptance if not their gratitude for it.

Rituals of reading, rituals of writing

Another way of understanding the local and disputed uses of knowledge is by looking at the oral and written transmission of texts. By deciphering an apparently universal cultural practice – the production and reproduction of books – we can examine in a new light three of the principal problems this

inkhirāt in Ṣafadī) in his mind, caused by eating too much hashish, and that he would fall in and out of states of derangement: Ibn Ḥajar, 1/81; Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 22b. See also the shaykh who dropped out of the group of the learned and began to eat hashish, calling it the “morsel of invocation of God and thought (luqaymatu‘dh-dhikr w‘al-fikr)”: Dhahabi, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 75.

¹⁵⁹ Ibn Kathīr, 14/72. For similar language used to scorn Yūsuf al-Qamīnī and Ibrāhīm Ibn Sa‘īd al-Shāghūrī see Ibn Kathīr, 13/216–17, 298.

¹⁶⁰ See Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies*, 117–22; P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Cornell, 1986), 125–48 and bibliography.

¹⁶¹ “Mulāzamatuhu li-hādhīhi‘t-ṭarīqatīsh-shāqa ‘alā‘n-nafs’: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 202–3.

study has addressed. First, we can understand how cultural productions such as books had specific social uses. Second, we can question the extent to which formal domains such as education and book production are constructions of our own making. And third, we can compare Damascus to other societies in an area that has usually been seen as a universal cultural practice and largely without local meanings.

Interpreting the social uses of familiar cultural objects in such a distant society poses its own difficulties. Perhaps the most formidable is their very familiarity. Books are such universal cultural artifacts that scholars often take them for “blank” objects that differ little from society to society. A number of scholars have recently tried to examine more specific social and cultural meanings and uses of the production of texts. Inspired by anthropological pioneers such as Jack Goody and adopted by historians, this approach has studied the production and reproduction of texts not only as a subject interesting in itself, but also as a means of addressing wider issues.

Partly because it was social scientists who first treated the production and reproduction of texts as cultural phenomena, the modeling of societies based on their various modes of transmission of texts has influenced the approach since its inception. Scholars have been especially interested in trying to understand differences among oral, manuscript, and print cultures.¹⁶² This strategy, having benefited scholars by treating the production of texts as a cultural and social practice that can open up other issues, nonetheless has several drawbacks. At the least, it assumes that pre-modern peoples wrote, read, and reproduced books for many of the same reasons they did in later periods. It also tends to lump together different societies at similar stages of technological development.

The most serious problem with this approach, from the perspective of a historian, is that universal types such as “oral,” “scribal,” or “print” cultures, however useful they may be in the broadest sense, tend to obscure the particular social uses texts had in societies that possessed similar technologies. Goody’s study was one of the first and remains one of the most influential studies of the social and cultural consequences of technological changes in book reproduction. However, his wide comparative framework misses some of the different uses of books in the pre-modern world. He also tends to reify culture as a static entity transmitted from one generation to the next, ascribing differences among oral, manuscript, and mechanical reproduction of texts to their efficiency in transmitting information more than anything else.¹⁶³ He sees the production and reproduction of texts largely as a problem of “memory storage,” which was improved first with alphabetic writing and then finally

¹⁶² See W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982) and Brian Street, *The Theory and Practice of Literacy* (Cambridge, 1984); E. A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write. Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, 1986).

¹⁶³ J. Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. 37, 165; J. Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968); R.W. Neitzen, “Hot Literacy in Cold Societies,” *CSSH* 33, no. 2 (Apr. 1991).

resolved with the advent of mechanical printing. Other scholars have followed Goody in being mainly interested in the pre-modern uses of books largely as they conducted to modern book production. These approaches have seen the production of books in the pre-modern world as a kind of imperfect precursor to a modern book production which “freed” writing from the problem of “memory storage.” By privileging those uses of books in the past that conducted to modern book production, these scholars have often assumed the existence of a kind of technological determinism. The strategy imposes a teleological progression to the reproduction of texts, and carries often unexamined assumptions of technological “progress,” if not European cultural triumphalism.

When we read backwards from outcomes in this way, one effect has been to obscure the various social uses of books in different pre-modern societies. When the text itself is treated as an inert vessel of information, and the mechanism of reproduction becomes the object of study, then the issue might justifiably become one of “efficiency.” However, if we ask what the relationship between producing and using books was, and how each imposed its logic on the other, then we better understand the varied uses and meanings of texts in various societies at similar levels of technological development.

Once we concentrate on such differences in the uses of books, it is striking how the social uses of book production in medieval Damascus diverged from other societies that have been better studied. Book production and reproduction resembled neither the commodified nor the bureaucratic cultural production of the modern world.¹⁶⁴ It little resembled the organized production of manuscripts for patrons, for the market, or in the scriptoria of the high

¹⁶⁴ Though books were certainly commodities, even if authors were typically not paid for composing them. There was a *sūq al-kutub* in Damascus, but it is not mentioned in the sources as often as the one in Cairo: Şafadî, *al-Wâfi*, 5/309; Nu‘aymî, 1/95; Abû Shâma, *Dhayl*, 234. There was also an international trade in books, as one book merchant, who was also a copyist and librarian, traveled around ‘Irâq, the Jazîra, and Syria in the trade: Şafadî, *al-Wâfi*, 12/218. In Damascus, booksellers gathered together every Friday: Şafadî, *al-Wâfi*, 4/89. There was also a market in Arabic manuscripts to provide pulp for Genoese paper manufacturers: L. Febvre, *The Coming of the Book* (New York, 1934), 30. Books left as waqfs were often stolen or seized and sold: Abû Shâma, *Dhayl*, 98; Ibn Kathîr, 14/8. There were collectors of books, who created a market for books as luxury products: see for examples of such luxury production and consumption Ibn Kathîr, 13/24; Abû Shâma, *Dhayl*, 183–4, 196; Nu‘aymî, 1/64; Jazârî, Köp. MS, 204; Ibn Shâkir, Vat. Ar. MS, 162; Şafadî, *al-Wâfi*, 12/6, 258; Şafadî, *A‘yân*, 66b. Ibn Abî Uşaybi‘a, 676 ff., 655 for a physician who had in his employ three full-time copyists. On book collecting among Mamlûks see Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage,” 93–4. It was copyists and booksellers who made money from the book trade. Copyists could be well paid for producing books as luxury items, as was the case with Nuwayrî, who wrote out al-Bukhârî’s *Sahîh* eight times, selling each volume as soon as he could have it bound, for 700 dirhams; he also sold a chronicle for 2,000 dirhams: Şafadî, *A‘yân*, 42a. However, the majority of the thousands of books composed in Damascus in this period were not written for sale or for patrons, but were produced in a few copies for their “benefit” (*naf*) and *baraka*. For a noted shaykh who copied 2,000 texts in his lifetime “for money and for his own use” see Ibn Shâkir, *Fawât*, 1/81. The physician-collector cited above himself copied many books. Paper production was also an industry in the city, until from 1354 Italian production began first to equal then surpass it: A. Blum, *Les Origines du papier, de l'imprimerie et de la gravure* (Paris, 1935). For one paper-making enterprise, see Abû Shâma, *Dhayl*, 86.

medieval Latin West.¹⁶⁵ Finally, book production was utterly unlike the printed literature of Sung China, either the state printing and distribution of classics for bureaucrats and examination candidates or the popular literature produced for commercial purposes.¹⁶⁶

The a‘yān of Damascus were conscious of an ambiguity in their uses of books. On the one hand, much of the culture of the city was centered on texts. The public reading was one of the major forms of cultural production in the city, and some of the great shaykhs were known for their readings. Some shaykhs had stipends for reciting certain texts in public.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, political protests occasionally took the form of a public reading of certain texts. In protest against the first audience held to investigate Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Mizzī read a portion of *al-Radd ‘ala al-jahmiyya* in the Umayyad Mosque, inciting the chief qādī Ibn Şaṣrā to imprison him.¹⁶⁸

Books were also emblems of prestige for the elite.¹⁶⁹ Rulers tried to write books and to memorize them, with varying degrees of success, and they rewarded others for memorizing texts.¹⁷⁰ Shaykhs also gained prestige by

¹⁶⁵ See E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent for Change* (Cambridge, 1979), 9–42 for bibliography on manuscript production in the high and late medieval Latin West. For the organization of manuscript production in thirteenth-century France, see Bourin-Derruau, *Temps d'équilibres*, 31–7.

¹⁶⁶ On book production in Sung China see Gernet, *Chinese Civilization*, 331–8; T.H.C. Lee, “Sung Education,” 107–8; H.K. Chan, *Control of Publishing in China, Past and Present* (Canberra, 1983); T.F. Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward*, ed. and revised by L.C. Goodrich (New York, 1955) and esp. Ming-Sun Poon, “Books and Printing in Sung China, 960–1279,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1979), 28–66, 73–4, 84–7, and 100–12 on the impact of the examination system on the printing of books; 113–44 on printing by the Sung state; 22–4, 167–81 on commercial printing in private hands.

¹⁶⁷ Abū Shāma, 113; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 655; Jazāri, Köp. MS, 164. Subkī, *Mu‘id al-nī‘am*, 162–3, distinguished between the qāfi‘ al-kursī, who read moralistic literature, ḥadīth, and *tafsīr* in mosques, madrasas, and khanqāhs and the qāṣṣ, who recited memorized texts in the street.

¹⁶⁸ Ibn Kathir, 14/38.

¹⁶⁹ For example, it was said of al-Firkah, one of the most famous shaykhs of the city, that “his books are proof of his standing (*makān*) with respect to ‘ilm’”: Nu‘aymī, 1/109. See also a book that “demonstrated [a shaykh’s] great learning (*yadullu ‘alā ‘ilm ‘azīm*)”: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/29; and another shaykh whose compositions “confirm his standing with respect to ‘ilm (*yadullu ‘alā mahallihī mina l-‘ilm*)”: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/263.

¹⁷⁰ Ayyūbid princes found memorization of books desirable if occasionally unreachable. Al-Ashraf was quoted as saying, “If I could memorize the Qur’ān, even though doing so would cost me my power, I would still memorize the Qur’ān”: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 31. For another example see the ten-volume compendium of Ḥanafī fiqh that al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam ordered written for him. He was seen reading it constantly, and at the end of each volume wrote: “‘Isā . . . b. Abī Bakr b. Ayyūb has completed this book by committing it to memory (anhāhu hīfzan).” Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī pointed out to the sultān that this claim might expose him to criticism, as “the greatest lecturer of Syria was able to memorize al-Qudūrī only because of his freedom from responsibilities, while the sultān was preoccupied with ruling the kingdom.” Al-Mu‘azzam replied that what he meant by memorizing was the meaning, not the articulation (*lafz*) itself. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/647. Al-Mu‘azzam gave prizes for memorizing books. Having studied Zamakhshari’s *Muṣaṣṣal* by “frequenting” a shaykh, he considered himself its champion, and offered a prize of thirty dirhams to anyone who memorized it. He also offered prizes of 100 dirhams to anyone who memorized the more daunting *Jāmī al-kabīr* by Kirmānī or the *Idāh* by Abū ‘Ali: Ibn Kathir, 13/72; Nu‘aymī, 1/580; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt*, 8/577; Ibn Khallikān, 3/162 reported that the prize for

learning, reciting, copying or composing books, to the extent that a shaykh's nickname could refer to a book he had memorized.¹⁷¹ Many of those with a claim to learning wrote at least one book, and some wrote hundreds.¹⁷² The scale of book production was very large relative to the number of learned people in the city, and though it is impossible to count the number of texts composed in the period, it was surely in the thousands. Furthermore, the possession of a book in memory and the ability to teach it were the stock-in-trade of the learned elite. Books were at the core of the initiation of the young, and much of a student's training was devoted to memorizing them and working on them with shaykhs. In studying texts with shaykhs young people could learn an astonishing number of texts from a single individual.¹⁷³

Finally, books had talismanic power as carriers of baraka.¹⁷⁴ They were objects of the ritual fastidiousness that other sacred things excited, and were protected for their purity. A measure of the effect books had on imaginations in Syria in a later period is conveyed in 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nabulustī's book of dream interpretation: "A book in a dream means power. He who sees a book in his hand in a dream will acquire power (*quwwa*)."¹⁷⁵

However, even though Damascenes valued books for all these reasons, they

memorizing the *Muṣaṣṣal* was one hundred dinars and a robe of honor. See Nu'aymī, 1/579 for a book "written" by al-Malik al-Mu'azzam, with the aid of a scholar. The Ayyūbid ruler of Hamā, al-Malik al-Manṣūr (d. 617/1220–1), wrote a ten-volume chronicle: *Abū Shāma, Dhayl*, 124.

¹⁷¹ Safadī, *A'yān*, 60b, for the shaykh known as "al-Ta'jīzī" because he had memorized the *Ta'jīz*.

¹⁷² See for example the 300-volume *Kitāb al-shāmil*, Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām*, Kōp. MS, 21. Ibn Taymiyya was said to have filled 4,000 fascicles: Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, Kōp. MS, 11.

¹⁷³ Safadī, *A'yān*, 65a, for an informant of Ṣafadī's who supposedly mastered 120 volumes from a single shaykh of the Banū 'Asākir.

¹⁷⁴ See for an example the story of the family that inherited the books of Nawawī, who kept two of them "for baraka (l'iṭ-tabarruk)": Yūnīnī, 4/185. The Qur'ān of 'Uthmān (Muṣḥaf 'Uthmān), kept in the Umayyad Mosque, was one of the most sacred objects in the city, and like other sacred objects it was veiled. Rulers, the a'yān, and other groups associated themselves with it. In 735/1334–5 a new white silk veil costing 4,000 dinars and taking a year and a half to make was completed: Jazārī, Kōp. MS, 415. When Ibn Qudāma died, someone said, "I saw in a dream the Muṣḥaf 'Uthmān fly into the sky from the Umayyad Mosque": Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 141; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāṭ*, 8/629. In 711/1311–12 a demonstration took the Muṣḥaf 'Uthmān along with caliphal standards and relics of the Prophet and marched in protest against new exactions: Ibn Kathir, 14/62. Another example of the brandishing of the Qur'ān was its use by one of the a'yān of the quarter of the date-merchants, Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Bakrān, during the reign of al-Malik al-Adil. He hung spears and other weapons at the entrance to the quarter, and whenever the sultān's troops or a messenger from Baghdād appeared, he would meet them on a riding-animal with a copy of the Qur'ān in a pouch, the people of the quarter watching from rooftops above: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 230. Reading sacred texts also had magical or talismanic uses: the Sūra al-Nūḥ was also recited 3,336 times because of a vision during the plague: Ibn Kathir, 14/226. In the famine brought about by the drought of 695/1295–6 the chief qādī requested that a certain shaykh read Bukhārī's *Saḥīḥ* in the Umayyad Mosque for its baraka: Jazārī, BN MS, 338. See also Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/4; Ibn Kathir, 14/225. For comparative material on the talismanic uses of books in the pre-modern world more generally see W.A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge, 1987), 58–66.

¹⁷⁵ Nabulusī, 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Ta'īr al-anām fi ta'bīr al-ahlām* (Beirut, 1384 A.H.), 2/178.

held books in suspicion, and occasionally derided them.¹⁷⁶ Throughout the period, young people were chided for reading books without the personal supervision of shaykhs. Although Ibn Jamā'a advised students to purchase or borrow the books they needed, as these were their “tools of knowledge,” he also warned that ultimately “knowledge is not gained from books, which are some of the most damaging of all corruptions.”¹⁷⁷ He also cautioned against trying to become learned without a shaykh: “One of the greatest calamities is taking texts as shaykhs.”¹⁷⁸ Writers told young people to avoid thinking too highly of themselves and doing without a shaykh: “This is the mark of ignorance and lack of discernment. What escapes him is greater than what he learns.”¹⁷⁹ Young people “should guard against relying on books, but should instead rely on whomever is best in that field.”¹⁸⁰ Nor could scholarly careers be advanced by the pen alone. Shams al-Dīn al-Sarkhadī, “the greatest polymath of his age,” had nonetheless a sharper pen than a tongue, “and had little good fortune in the world, never obtaining a manṣab.”¹⁸¹

Moreover, there were ways of acquiring ʿilm that bypassed the mediation of written texts. Most people experienced the Qur’ān and ḥadīth as oral performances rather than texts, and indeed the memorization of the Qur’ān has long been central to the education of children.¹⁸² Oral transmission also was the preferred, in some respects the sole, acceptable means of learning ḥadīth. ḥadīth scholars not only insisted that ḥadīth should be learned orally from someone in a direct line of transmission to the Prophet, some also claimed that ḥadīth should not be put in writing at all. One debated issue was whether a scholar could claim a place in an *isnād* (the chain of transmission of a ḥadīth) if he copied down ḥadīth in a ḥadīth-session, even as he memorized it

¹⁷⁶ For the latter, see for example the poem written by Abd Allah Ibn ʿAsākir; a ḥanīfi described as one of the ayyān al-mashāyikh, who responded to criticism of ṣūfi practices: “Poverty is [the ṣūfīs’] glory, and truth (*al-haqq*) their excellence, and grace (*lutf*) their distinction . . . this is their virtue (*fadl*) not reading in books (*ad-dars fīl-kutub*); this is their glory, not money or lineage”: Ibn Shākir, 21/41–2; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāt*, 8/53–4.

¹⁷⁷ *Adurr al-mafāṣid*: Ibn Jamā'a, 123, 163. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 89, has quoted a similar sentiment from Ibn Abī Usaybi'a, 691: “I command you not to learn your sciences from books, even though you may trust your ability to understand. Resort to professors for each science you seek to acquire; and should your professor be limited in his knowledge take all that he can offer, until you find another more accomplished than he.”

¹⁷⁸ “Min aṣzam al-baliyya tashayyakhaṣ-ṣaḥīfa”: Ibn Jamā'a, 87. Also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 26.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 134. For a similar sentiment, see the poem quoted by Subkī: “If you want knowledge without a shaykh, then you have departed from the path of the mustaqim; and things will become so obscure for you that you will become more errant than Thomas the Ḥakim”: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/35. ¹⁸⁰ Ibn Jamā'a, 113–15. ¹⁸¹ Nu'aymī, 1/223.

¹⁸² Recent studies of the uses of oral transmission and the public performance of sacred texts in the Islamic world include F. Denny, “Qur’ān Recitation: a Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission,” *Oral Tradition* 4 (1989); D. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco* (Princeton, 1985); and Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, esp. 99–115. See also Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. II, 790, for a comparison of the importance of oral transmission of sacred texts in Islamic and Hindu law. See Pouzet, *Damas*, 177–99 for instruction in the Qur’ān and ḥadīth in the city; Pouzet, “Prises de position autour du *sama'* en Orient musulman au VIIe/XIIIe siècle,” *SI* 57 (1983), 119–34.

from a recognized authority. Some authorities held that when scholars transcribed ḥadīth they were prevented from understanding them.¹⁸³ Great ḥadīth scholars were lauded for dispensing with written texts entirely. A famous ḥadīth scholar, al-Dhahabī, holder of the manṣab at the dār al-ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya, related ḥadīth without error and “never glanced at a book [of ḥadīth] or of *rijāl* [a genre that listed transmitters of ḥadīth].”¹⁸⁴ An illustration of the importance Damascenes placed on oral transmission of ḥadīth was the mode of transmission of Bayhaqī’s *Sunan* into Damascus. A shaykh heard two volumes of the work from Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (himself an immigrant), and related it on Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s authority to anyone who wanted to hear it.¹⁸⁵ People were said to have come from as far as Aleppo to audit a text that existed in numerous copies throughout the region.

This incorporation of lines of transmission continued throughout life. Shaykhs traveled to learn ḥadīth throughout the period, as they had since the early Islamic era: “There are four [categories of people] from whom one should not accept guidance: the guard of a neighborhood (ḥāris al-darb); the crier of the qādī (munādī al-qādī); the son of a ḥadīth scholar; and a man who writes [down ḥadīth] in his own city and does not travel in search of ḥadīth.”¹⁸⁶ With sacred texts such as the Qur’ān and ḥadīth, oral transmission had a triple purpose: it connected auditors to revelation and the Prophet directly; it linked them to all who had transmitted the text in the past; and the moment of transmission was itself a ritual moment.

The sense that transmission established a tangible link between the auditor and the Prophet is why elderly transmitters were valued so highly. An example of this, an unlikely one to Damascenes, was the rich man Ibn al-Shihna (d. 730/1329–30). He was well over a hundred years old when his name was discovered in the “book of auditors” in Qasyūn as having audited ḥadīth in 630/1232–3. He had lived most of his life “without telling ḥadīth scholars anything,” and once discovered he began to relate ḥadīth and give ijāzahs in the Umayyad Mosque.¹⁸⁷ Adults took young children (and also themselves) to old shaykhs, in order to shorten the links of transmission between them and the Prophet.¹⁸⁸ Some criticized this practice because children were less likely to understand what they memorized. Critics also worried that the practice reduced confidence in the chain of transmission, out of fear that “one’s shaykhs and their shaykhs were too young to understand the content of what they transmit-

¹⁸³ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 206–7: “He may say, ‘I attended,’ and not [so and so] related to us, or [so and so] informed us (yaqūl ‘hadartu’ wa-lā yaqūl ‘hadathānā’ wa-lā ‘akhbaranā’).” See *ibid.*, 296 ff. for debate over whether ḥadīth and “al-‘ilm” should be written down at all.

¹⁸⁴ Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 48. ¹⁸⁵ Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 45a.

¹⁸⁶ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 369. ¹⁸⁷ Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 64a.

¹⁸⁸ See for one example the shaykh who “connected the young with the aged (al-ḥaqqaṣ-ṣighar b’il-kibar)”: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 62; also Tāj al-Dīn al-Kindī, famous at the end of his career for being the longest living link in an isnād on earth (“a‘lā ahl al-ard isnādān”) in Qur’ān recitation, as he lived eighty-three years after first learning it: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 15/51.

¹⁸⁹ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 5/67.

ted.”¹⁸⁹ But it demonstrates that some of the a‘yān at least believed that the incorporation of the line of transmission was as important as the content of what was transmitted.

The insertion of young people into lines of transmission of texts was a central part of their initiation into the culture of the a‘yān. We know almost nothing about early education in this period, because the sources were largely uninterested in childhood. Beyond the occasional mention of a Qur‘ān school (*maktab*) what we know of the education of children comes largely from the biographical notices, necessarily written after their deaths, of the children of the authors of our sources.¹⁹⁰ As few and as touching as they are, these texts give us a rare glimpse into how fathers raised their children. When the historian Abū Shāma’s son died at the age of eight, his father wrote in his biographical notice that he had taken him to hear ḥadīth and other texts from over 170 shaykhs. Abū Shāma himself read books to another son, including works of famous Damascenes such as Ibn ‘Asākir and Ibn Abī ‘Aṣrūn which he had learned from their authors.¹⁹¹ Other shaykhs read texts to their daughters.¹⁹²

Yet it was not only sacred texts that were transmitted without the necessary mediation of books. Many other texts were learned and transmitted orally. The lecture was often the oral production of a pre-existing text. Other forms of knowledge were acquired without any exposure to a text, oral or written, at all. Some shaykhs, such as the famous blind shaykh Ibn Qawām (d. 658/1260), a member of a famous a‘yān household, acquired and transmitted other forms of ‘ilm paranormally. Once, while giving an exegesis of the Qur‘ān, someone asked the shaykh how he came up with an original interpretation, “yet you neither read nor write? Where did you get this from (min ayna laka hādhā)?” The shaykh responded: “Just as I hear the questions, so I hear the response.”¹⁹³ Another example of paranormal transmission of ‘ilm was one of the most noted and most dubious holy men in the city, al-Bājirīqī (d. 724/1323–4). The head of the physicians of the city was sitting with Bājirīqī in a garden when a peasant who worked there came upon them. Bājirīqī ordered the peasant to sit before him. Once the peasant was settled, Bājirīqī began to stare at him, then ordered the peasant to speak to the rā‘is “until he woke up.” The rā‘is related what happened next: “The peasant began to discourse with me in all fields of medicine – the general principles of medicine and its specific applications (fī kulliyyāti ṭ-ṭibb wa-juz‘iyyātihi) – concerning the various modes of treatment, using the most specialized technical terms which only a

¹⁸⁹ For two maktabs in Damascus see Ibn Kathīr, 13/335; Nu‘aymī, 1/225.

¹⁹⁰ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 84 176; Ibn Kathīr, 13/274. In another citation of childhood education, of one of the Banū Subkī it was said that his father got him ijāzās from the “shaykhs of his time” in Egypt and Syria: “istajāza lahu wāliduhu mashayikh ‘aṣrīhi mina d-diyār al-miṣriyya wash-shām”; the father then brought son to ḥadīth-sessions where he heard ḥadīth from the shaykhs of his city (“mashayikh bilādihī”): Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/247. For another shaykh who read texts to his son see Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 86a. For shaykhs who took their sons to other shaykhs to read texts see Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 59a; Jazārī, BN MS, 492. ¹⁹² Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 15/117.

¹⁹¹ Yūnīnī, 1/399; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 9/245; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/225.

small number of skilled [physicians] know.” After an hour the peasant regained his normal consciousness and reported that he was not aware of what he was saying, but that the words fell from his tongue (*jarā 'alā lisānī*).¹⁹⁴ As this anecdote and others like it show, *'ilm* did not require texts to contain it, but existed independently of the books we consider its necessary vessels and vehicles. The shaykhs who carried *'ilm* acquired it without the necessary mediation of texts.

What accounts for this paradoxical suspicion of written texts within a culture that so highly valued them? The reason is partly to be found in a relationship between the production and reproduction of texts that was different from that in many other societies. The idea that books are singular products of individual wills, belonging to their authors as unmistakably as their personalities, is a modern one that would not have been understood in Damascus. Authors of books generally did not see themselves as creators of unique commodities, although there were some exceptions. Nor did those engaged in the production and reproduction of books always see themselves as instrumental carriers of information.

Damascenes rarely wrote, copied, acquired, or read books purely for the information they contained. On the contrary, books had other uses and meanings. Authors of books, copyists, booksellers, owners, and readers experienced their ties to one another in part as personal altruistic bonds. Booksellers were not in business just for profit (*matjar*), but to benefit others (*intifā'*).¹⁹⁵ Authors often composed books in single copies for specific individuals, much as they composed *fatwās*. When others copied such works, it was often to make a personal copy of a useful text.¹⁹⁶ Readers as individuals who perused texts in private for the information they contained were condemned throughout the period. While there were exceptions, especially with respect to the basic manuals (*qawā'id*) or bluffer's guides (the “man lā yaḥduruhu” literature) in various fields, private reading was a subject of debate. Damascenes were advised to read books not silently and in private but aloud with a shaykh or a group.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibn Hajar, 4/13. ¹⁹⁵ For an example see Yūnīnī, 2/355.

¹⁹⁶ See for example Ibn Taymiyya's explanation of how the *'Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya* came to be written and distributed: “A qāḍī came from Wāsit, and complained of the practices of the people of that city [who suffered] under a regime of usurpation, ignorance, and lack of instruction (*durūs*) in *'ilm* or religion. He asked me to write a creedal statement (*'aqīda*) that would be a support to him. I declined, saying that others had [already] recorded the doctrines (*'aqā'id*) of the imāms of the sunna. He said ‘no, I want you to write one,’ so I wrote it and many copies were made of it, and it spread through Egypt and Irāq and other places”: Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, Köp. MS, 84. Ibn Jamā'a, 165–7, advised students that they should not occupy themselves with prolonged copying, unless they lacked the purchase price or rental fee of a book.

¹⁹⁷ See for example how a son of Abū Shāma read even his father's books with a shaykh: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 176. For another example see the relationship between Ṣafadī and his student Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī. Subkī learned Ṣafadī's books with him, and Ṣafadī in turn both copied and recited one of Subkī's books in a *ḥalqa*: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/94. Ibn Jamā'a suggested that the dars begin with praise for the author of a text and end with prayers for his sake: Ibn Jamā'a, 162. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 24–8.

This is why the sources claimed that the selection of a book involved consideration of the shaykh who would teach it, and why Damascenes believed that the selection of a book had social and moral consequences. Some writers quoted older arguments to the effect that learning from books was superior to learning from teachers, but these were exceptions rare enough to merit mention.¹⁹⁸ The advice literature cautioned young people not to rely on books when they wanted to master a field, but to seek out whomever was “best” in it, according to criteria that included piety, probity, and compassion.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, reading a book with a shaykh was not just a means of ensuring accuracy, as some western scholars have occasionally believed.²⁰⁰ When Damascenes learned a book with a shaykh, they entered a line of transmission that stretched back to the author, and they appropriated some of the authority of the others in the chain. Damascenes gained a reputation for learning a book with its author or with someone who learned it from the author.²⁰¹ When Damascenes read books, they often recognized the handwriting of their intellectual ancestors as a physical link to them, and having completed the book with a shaykh they often inscribed their own names in it.²⁰² Mastery of a book was in part a means of acquiring the authority of older or more powerful men.

This forging of a personal connection to powerful men is one reason why some people collected large numbers of ijāzās, certificates from a shaykh that a book they taught they had acquired from another shaykh. This was especially true in the case of prestigious ijāzās that reached back many generations.²⁰³ Many ijāzās did not refer to single books, but rather to all that one shaykh could relate.²⁰⁴

Even when people had books but no shaykhs with whom to study them, they sought a kind of intimacy with authors of texts. A shaykh who studied the works of Ibn 'Arabī made visitations repeatedly to his tomb (“yulāzim ziyāra qabrihi”) and read his books there, “cleaving to” (lāzama) the texts of Ibn

¹⁹⁸ See for example Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/106–7 and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, 2/99–106 for the views of Ibn Rīdwān (d. 460), the famous Egyptian physician: “wa-lahu musannaf fī 'anna't-ta'allum mina'l-kutub awfaq mina'l-mu'allimīn.” His views were refuted by another famous physician, Ibn Bū'lān, quoted in part in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, 2/99–106.

¹⁹⁹ Ibn Jamā'a, 113–15.

²⁰⁰ See for example J. Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, G. French trans. (Princeton, 1984), 27–36.

²⁰¹ See for example Ibn Ḥajar, 2/59. ²⁰² For one example see Ibn Khallikān, 2/461.

²⁰³ Ijāzās have received much scholarly attention, though their social uses remain largely unstudied: see Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 31–3; Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, 31–6; Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 140–52; Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, I, 175–80; G. Vajda, *Les certificats de lecture et de la transmission dans les manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* (Paris: Publications de l'Institut de recherches et de l'histoire des textes, VI, 1957). Ibn Jamā'a had over 700 ijāzās, Birzālī over 3,000, and Dhahabī heard ḥadīth and learned texts from 1,200 shaykhs: Jazarī, Kōp. MS, 311; Nu'aymī, 1/79, 112, 113. Ijāzās could extend over many generations of scholars: one recorded by Jazarī had thirteen names written on it: Jazarī, Kōp. MS, a note glued on to page 158 in Jazarī's hand. Rulers also tried to acquire ijāzās, and some even granted them for texts they had learned: Yūnīnī, 1/429.

²⁰⁴ For one example of the ijāza in “what [the shaykh] related (mā yarwīhi)” see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 163.

‘Arabī, just as one would “cleave to” a shaykh.²⁰⁵ In a dream another shaykh associated the body of a shaykh with the words of a text. Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī dreamt that he heard a voice calling to him: “This is the house of the Imām Ghazālī.” In the dream he entered the house, and finding Ghazālī’s tomb inside he opened it (kashaftuhu); then finding Ghazālī’s corpse within wrapped in cotton he unveiled his face (kashaftu ‘an wajhīh) and kissed it. When he awoke, “I told myself that I should memorize [some of] Ghazālī’s discourse (kalām al-Ghazālī). I picked up his book, *al-Muṣṭasfā fi ‘uṣūl al-fiqh*, and memorized it in a short time.”²⁰⁶ The “reading” of a book was thus for Sayf al-Dīn in part a means of conjuring up the intimate presence of its author.

Damasceues brandished texts such as *ijāzas* and *mashyakhas* (lists of shaykhs with whom scholars audited texts) as emblems of prestige when they attested to their positions in chains of transmission. While *ijāzas* and *mashyakhas* have long attracted scholarly attention, other written testaments to the oral reception of texts existed. At a banquet held by the amīr Fakhr al-Dīn Lū'lū', forty ḥadīth were recited, and one of those attending the banquet recorded the names of all those present.²⁰⁷ One of the highest emblems of scholarly honor was a large *mashyakha*, especially the *arba‘īn buldāniyya*, “the forty by city,” usually an enormous book that listed forty ḥadīth audited from forty shaykhs in each of forty cities to which a scholar had traveled.²⁰⁸ Other records of learning texts were preserved. In the Jabal Qasyūn, there was a “booklet of auditors” (*kurrāṣa’s-sāmi‘in*) that recorded the names of all who heard Bukhārī’s *Sahīh* there.²⁰⁹ On a more modest level, after having memorized some ḥadīth and the sciences associated with it, one shaykh “had some writings of shaykhs (*khuṭūṭ al-ashyākh*) confirming his knowledge.”²¹⁰

Whereas ḥadīth transmitters were scrupulous about reproducing narratives exactly, written texts were mutable. The classical literature from the ‘Abbāsid period was often copied as integral single texts, especially for the luxury market. But with respect to their own book production, Damascenes did not necessarily reproduce texts as exact copies of single products. This was a common characteristic of much pre-modern manuscript production: before commodified production gave publishers an incentive to produce unique products, exact reproduction was generally guaranteed only to sacred texts or classics. Nor was there any cult of individual genius that would call for the exact reproduction of books.

Books in Damascus were not of necessity produced as single acts of a creative autonomous will. Texts were rather enacted fortuitously in time, and could be incorporated in other texts in different ways. Texts were often

²⁰⁵ Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, Köp. MS. 40; BL MS. 86; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/180.

²⁰⁶ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/341–2. ²⁰⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi, Köp. MS. 118.

²⁰⁸ Birzālī wrote one in twenty volumes: Nu‘aymī, 1/122–3; Ibn ‘Asākir also wrote one: Nu‘aymī, 1/101. For a large *mashyakha* in ten volumes covering one hundred shaykhs see Jazarī, BN MS. 72. ²⁰⁹ Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 64a. ²¹⁰ Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 60b.

shortened, lengthened, amended, and interpreted in their margins. Even titles were not unique. Subkī took the title of one of his father's books as the title of one of his own, "by way of gaining the baraka of his father's work (ṣanī' al-wālid)."211 The relationship between authorship and copying, between the production and reproduction of books, was not, as might be expected, a question of seniority and intellectual prestige. Scholars with the highest intellectual prestige copied or abridged texts out of what they described as the desire for benefit, baraka, or out of "love" (ḥubb or maḥabba) for the author.²¹² Where poetry and other forms of literature were often copied as integral texts, living poets made liberal use of the verses of others, and certain lines appear repeatedly in different poems and contexts.

Some also believed that copying had a talismanic power that would give them spiritual benefit. Ibn al-Jawzī requested that after his death the pens he used to copy ḥadīth be collected and heated in the water with which his corpse was washed; this was done, and benefit was obtained from the liquid.²¹³ Others copied as a means of bringing themselves into the presence of the author of the text, living or dead. This was the case of the shaykh who became an ascetic, living off his meager savings, and "cleaved to" the books of Ibn 'Arabī, copying a number of them while constantly visiting Ibn 'Arabī's tomb.²¹⁴ Another shaykh who experienced such "love" for Ibn 'Arabī that he was buried in his tomb, copied two pages of his work a day, as he copied two pages of ḥadīth.²¹⁵ Copying was also hedged in by ritual restrictions. The copyist was to use ritually pure inks and paper, and was not to orphan the word "‘abd" in a name such as 'Abd Allah," at the end of a line.²¹⁶ Copying also had ritualistic promise. One writer related the ḥadīth "he who writes some 'ilm from me, and writes his prayer for me with it, will never cease to receive reward as long as that book is read."²¹⁷

The boundaries between written and oral reproduction of texts were not

²¹¹ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/213–14.

²¹² For abridging a text out of love for its author, see Şafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/343, for a shaykh who copied Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī's *al-İhkām fi 'usūl al-ahkām* "out of his love for him (min maḥabbatihī lahu)." Some examples of copying for benefit or baraka: one of Saladin's secretaries had a passion for copying books: Nu'aymī, 1/91. A shaykh who was a qāfi and shaykh of a dār al-ḥadīth copied out 500 volumes: Ibn Kathīr, 14/158. An amīr who had been governor of Egypt (d. 731) was known for having audited al-Bukhārī and for copying the entire text in his own hand: Ibn Kathīr, 14/155. Ibn Asākir made two fair copies of the *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* in his own hand: Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS. 5. Abū 'Umar Muhammad Ibn Qudāma made copies of many books for his family and friends without payment: Ibn Rajab, 2/ 52; Sibī' Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt*, 8/547; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 69–71; Ibn Kathīr, 13/59. Birzālī's daughter wrote out al-Bukhārī in thirteen volumes, and Birzālī recited it in the Umayyad Mosque under the Qubba al-Nasr. This copy became the definitive text ("aṣl mu'tamad") from which the people would copy: Ibn Kathīr: 14/185. One possible reason that copying was generally such an informal practice, taking place outside the guilds and religious bodies that controlled reproduction of texts in the Latin West, was the easy availability of cheap paper long before its diffusion in Europe after 1350. ²¹³ Ibn Khallikān, 2/321.

²¹⁴ Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/180. ²¹⁵ Ibn Kathīr, 13/318. ²¹⁶ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 306.

²¹⁷ Balqīnī, *Maḥāsin al-İṣṭilāḥ*, in the marginal commentary to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 307. Several similar ḥadīth are quoted by the same author.

fixed. Shaykhs reproduced texts from memory in public performances. They also copied texts and composed books of *ḥadīth* as a means of inscribing them in the memory.²¹⁸ The true possession of a book, the authors of the period repeated again and again, was internal, as the “two wings” of *‘ilm* were memory and oral discussion.²¹⁹ A commonplace in the biographical dictionaries was the preservation of texts in the memory after their destruction by fire. Ibn Khallikān related the story of a fifth-century Khurasānī scholar who boasted that if all of al-Shāfi‘ī’s books were burned he could write them out himself from memory.²²⁰ A similar story was told of the fourth-century Baghdādī who was able to quote from the entirety of his library after it burned down.²²¹ In Damascus shaykhs rated one another based on the speed with which they memorized texts and the quantity and difficulty of what they memorized.²²² Phrases such as “he never heard anything without memorizing it, and never memorized anything and then forgot it” appear frequently in the biographical dictionaries.²²³

Writers warned against learning from anyone who read from a sacred text rather than memory: “Do not acquire *‘ilm* from one who reads it from a written copy of the Qur‘ān or off a piece of paper; in other words, do not recite the Qur‘ān after one who reads it from a written text; or *ḥadīth* or other texts from one who takes it from a piece of paper.”²²⁴ Ibn Jamā‘a suggested that young people not purchase books, because books should be an aid to memorization and not a substitute for memory. He made his point with a line of verse: “If you are incapable of memorizing, then accumulating books will do you no good.”²²⁵ Shaykhs who lacked confidence in their own memories forbade others from relating narratives on their authority. “Concerning oral narratives (*riwāya*),” warned one cautious shaykh, “I forbid anyone to relate my accounts of the texts I have audited. This is because of the difficulty of fulfilling the conditions set down by our authorities requiring the verification of the accuracy of memory from the moment a text is audited until it is related.

²¹⁸ Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Muqaddima*, 374–5.

²¹⁹ Şafadi, *al-Wāft*, 13/415. This word may refer to armies rather than birds, as the order of battle of many armies of the period had “two wings” and a center as their principal tactical units.

²²⁰ Ibn Khalikān, 2/370.

²²¹ Abū al-Hilāl al-Askārī, *al-Hathth ‘alā ṭalab al-‘ilm*, Asir Effendi MS 433, 74.

²²² For other heroic memories, see Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 48: “He never heard anything without memorizing it”; the shaykh who memorized the *Sahīh* of Muslim in four months, also able to memorize seventy *ḥadīth* in a single sitting: Yūnīnī, 2/59; the shaykh who memorized the *Mukhtaṣar* of Ibn al-Hājib in nineteen days, in spite of the difficulty of the language: Şafadi, *al-Wāft*, 4/226–7; the shaykh able to memorize a fascicule in a single day: Şafadi, *al-Wāft*, 3/227; the shaykh who memorized the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī in fifty nights: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 130. For more typical praise of a shaykh as “speedy of memory (*sarf al-ḥifz*)” see Jazārī, BN MS, 8b. These are just several of the many examples that could be cited. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 28–31.

²²³ See for example Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 48.

²²⁴ Şafadi, *al-Wāft*, 21/109: “lā tā’ khudhu’l-‘ilmā min ṣaḥaf wa-lā muṣḥaf ya‘nī lā yaqrā’u'l-qur‘ān ‘alā man qarā'a min muṣḥaf wa-lā 'l-ḥadīth wa-ghayrhu 'alā man qarā'a dhālikā min ṣuḥuf.” Also see Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 103–7. ²²⁵ Ibn Jamā‘a, 164.

The books I have audited are not fixed in my memory.”²²⁶ Finally, to have acquired texts merely by reading them could subject an individual to suspicion. One shaykh was said to have had “no studies and no knowledge except from reading.”²²⁷

Authors were also fearful of the spiritual consequences of writing books. An anecdote Ibn Khallikān related to his contemporaries concerning al-Mawārdī (d. 450/1058) illustrated the spiritual dangers writers perceived in composing books: “None of his books appeared in his lifetime, but rather were put in a storage-place. When death approached him he said to someone he had confidence in, ‘the books that are in a certain place owned by a certain person are all my compositions. I did not publish them because my motives towards God were not pure, so if death comes upon me, when I fall into my death-agonies take my hand in yours. If I grab your hand and squeeze it know that nothing has been accepted from me, and go and throw the books into the Tigris at night. If my hand remains open and does not grasp yours know that they have been accepted, and that I have triumphed with respect to [the purity of] my intentions.’” Mawārdī’s friend related: “When death approached him I put my hand in his, and his remained open and did not grasp mine. I knew that this was the sign of acceptance, and I published his books afterwards.”²²⁸ The writing of books, like the reading of them, was an act that had its dangers.

Because Damascenes valued the acquisition of a book in memory so highly, they gave much thought to mnemonic techniques and the psychology and even psycho-pharmacology of memory.²²⁹ Ibn Jamā‘a suggested that young people should avoid anything that interferes with memorization, including “reading inscriptions on tombs, walking between two camels haltered in a line, or flicking away lice.” He also followed ancient dietary advice in advising young people to avoid foods that will render them “senseless and stupid” such as sour apples, baklava, vinegar, and anything that by increasing congestion “dulls the mind, such as too much milk or fish.” God, he pointed out, has provided such mind-strengtheners as gum, rose water, honey, sugar, and eating twenty-one raisins daily, all of which “aid the memory and prevent illness by reducing congestion.”²³⁰ Our sources do not provide us with examples of the training of memory nearly as detailed as those found in

²²⁶ “Wa-‘amma’r-riwāya fa‘innī lam asmāḥ li-ahad bi-‘an yarwaya ‘annī masmū‘ātī li-ṣū‘uba mā sharāṭahu aṣḥābūnā fi-daqbī bīl-hifzī min ḥayn samī‘a ilā ḥayn rawā, wānna al-kutub allatī samī‘tūhā lam takun mahfūza ‘indī’: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/89.

²²⁷ “Kāna lā ishtīghāl lahu wa lā ‘ilmā min ghayr‘il-muṭāli‘a’: Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 57b.

²²⁸ Ibn Khallikān, 2/444.

²²⁹ See for comparison on mnemonics and the social uses of memory, M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. 16–45, 80–188; J. Parry, “The Brahmanical Tradition and the Technology of the Intellect,” in J. Overy ed., *Reason and Morality* (New York and London, 1985); F.A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966); D. Eickelman, “The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1978), 485–516; Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*.

²³⁰ Ibn Jamā‘a, 77. Also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 29. On medieval European ideas of the effect of diet on memory see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 50.

medieval Europe. We do not encounter any examples of the architectural mnemonics so characteristic of the training of memories in Europe – though scholars may some day encounter evidence of them. Nonetheless, with respect to the care of the memory, there appear to be a number of similarities between the Middle East and Europe, due partly to the influence of Arabic literature on Europe, and partly to the common origins of the ideas of both in Galen.²³¹

In the lecture, boundaries between the text studied, the script of the lesson, and the record of the lecture blurred. Not only was the lesson itself often a memorized text about a text, those in attendance took the lesson itself as a text which they then memorized, and later wrote down.²³² For mature scholars, the texts they had memorized as young people now became scripts for oral performances.²³³ Lecturers shaped their lectures, as writers shaped their texts, to make memorization easier.²³⁴ Ibn al-Zamlakānī was praised for lessons that “caused his listeners to memorize without having to practice.”²³⁵ Great shaykhs discoursed effortlessly, “as though reading from a book,” and they lectured “as though delivering a sermon.”²³⁶ Even writing was a public performance, as biographers much lauded the ability to write fair copy without notes quickly, “from the tip of the pen” (min rā’s al-qalam) – praising in one case a writer who composed on horseback.²³⁷ When Damascenes

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² For an example of a dars as a performance from a memorized script see Dhahabī, *Tā’rīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 58, in which a shaykh was praised for his ability to assimilate three pages at a glance, and then to give the dars without error. Another shaykh praised for giving lectures straight from memory: Ibn Kathīr, 14/169. Ibn Şaşrā was praised for memorizing four lectures a day: Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 8/16. Even the length of a lecture could be reckoned in terms of the size of the script: a dars of 600 lines (slightly larger than the single standard Syrian fascicule – qat’ baladī – of 500 lines) was praised for being well delivered: Nu’aymī, 1/59. Students were told to memorize the “benefits” (fawā’id) of the majlis of a shaykh. When departing the majlis they were advised to concentrate on collective memorization (*mudhākara*) of the discourse of the shaykh, “because in collective memorization there is great benefit”: Ibn Jamā’ā, 143. See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Majlis min majālis al-hāfiẓ Ibn ‘Asākir fi masjid dimashq* (Damascus, 1979), esp. 18, for an example of how the disciple of a shaykh transcribed the proceedings of a majlis al-‘ilm, and then read and corrected it with his master. This was also true in ḥadīth scholarship, where listeners copied ḥadīth they heard in ḥadīth-sessions, and reproduced them orally: Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Muqaddima*, 206–8.

²³³ See for example Ṣafādī, *A’yān*, 201a. For an Irbili shaykh’s lectures taken from a memorized section of Ghazālī’s *Ihyā* (“wa-kāna yulqī fi jumla durūsihi min kitāb al-ihyā darsan hīfzān”), see Ibn Khallikān, 1/90.

²³⁴ See for example the complaint made of a book: “Its complicated and difficult pronunciation leaves no trace on the mind as an aid to memory (fa’innā alfāz al-mukhtaṣar qalīqatūn ‘uqdatūn mā yartasimū mā nāhā fi dhihn li-yusā’ida ‘alā’l-hifz’): Nu’aymī, 1/248.

²³⁵ Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/214.

²³⁶ A shaykh was said to have held a dars in which he asked for someone to choose a Qur’ānic verse for discussion “and when they selected one, he discoursed on it with felicitous expressions and great learning, as though he were reading from a book (ka’innamā yaqrā’ min kitāb).” This shaykh was also known for being able to recite a text from memory immediately after having read it but once: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 5/14. For praise of a shaykh who gave the lecture as though it were a khutba see Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/343.

²³⁷ Subkī’s father for example was known for writing out ten pages of final copy extemporaneously (“min zāhri qalbīh”) at a sitting, without making a draft copy: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/170. The author of the 300-volume *Kitāb al-shāmil* wrote extemporaneously without revision,

memorized books, it was not a “private” act. Young people relied on others to prompt them, and after memorizing a text they amended it and corrected it with a shaykh.²³⁸ For this reason, writers warned, “reading with a shaykh is preferable and more advantageous than reading alone.”²³⁹ A fine illustration of the blurring of the dars, writing, and memory is an anecdote Ibn Khallikān related of al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072). Qushayrī sat at the feet of a shaykh for several days, when the shaykh admonished him that the particular field of knowledge could not be acquired solely by auditing, but that it had to be written down as well (“hādhā l-ilm lā yuhsal b’il-samā’ wa-lā budda mina’ḍ-dābṭi b’il-kitāba”). Qushayrī then “astonished” the teacher by repeating exactly everything he had heard in his days of attendance. The shaykh then honored him and told him, unusually: “You do not need the dars; it will be sufficient for you to read my books.”²⁴⁰

This endless circular displacement between the oral and the written, between production and reproduction, identifies the production of texts as a ritual practice. When students read books with shaykhs it was not just to check them for accuracy, but also to inscribe them in the memory so that they could later be performed orally, and to gain the baraka of the line of transmission. Because of this ritual aspect of the reproduction of books, the writer and the reader were never entirely differentiated from the shaykh and the disciple. Books were never so much read as performed, and learning a book was in part an imitation of the shaykh’s performance of the text, including his pronunciation, intonation, and gestures. It was partly for this reason that reading alone without a shaykh was discouraged.²⁴¹

Thus, to answer our original question, what excited suspicion of books was not the texts themselves. The reason that books were objects of such simultaneous esteem and disdain was that the transmission of *ilm* was not

ready for composition (“kāna yaktub min ṣadrihi min ghayr murāja’ā kitāb hālatu’t-taṣnīf”): Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, Kōp. MS, 21. While in prison Ibn Taymiyya wrote from memory without other books as sources: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, Kōp. MS, 12. Ibn Taymiyya wrote at a rate of a volume (*mujallad*) a day, and was capable of writing out forty pages in a single sitting: *ibid.*, 26; see also Ibn Kathīr, 14/164. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ā, 687, for a shaykh who wrote without making a draft copy. See Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/85 for Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hillī, witnessed composing on horseback: “kāna yuṣannif wa-hwa rākib”; Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/341 for a bureaucrat who drafted decrees extemporaneously, “from the tip of his pen (min rā’s qalamih).” See Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 46 for a shaykh who wrote a commentary entirely from memory (“alā ẓahr qalbih”). With only pen, ink, paper, and a copy of the text, he quoted voluminously from other commentators, “astonishing” his onlookers.

²³⁸ For prompting, see the shaykh who “benefited” students by “facilitating” (ashala) their readings of texts of fiqh: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 149. See Nawawī’s account of memorizing books: after listing two books that he memorized, including the *Tanbīh*, the standard of Shāfi’i fiqh in the city, “I began to comment on and confirm” the reading of the texts with the aid of a shaykh: “ja’altu ashraḥu wa-‘usahḥiḥu ‘alā’sh-shaykh”: Yūnīnī, 3/285. See also Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 30.

²³⁹ “Fa’l-qirā’ā ‘alā’l-‘ulamā’ afḍal w’ajdā min qirā’ati’l-insān li-nafṣih”: Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/109. See Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 32–3 for an acute discussion of solitary reading in the pre-modern world more generally. ²⁴⁰ Ibn Khallikān, 2/375.

²⁴¹ Cf. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 131–42, 160–1, 164–5.

entirely alienated from the ritual nature of its production. Books in medieval Damascus were not yet separated from the oral performances in relation to which they functioned both as records and as scripts. Reading had not yet entirely lost the character of oral forms of transmission. Readers often entered into the physical presence of one another, where their interactions were partly ritual and mimetic; and when readers read books in private they sometimes took them as fetishes standing in for absent shaykhs. Book production was thus only a partially commodified form of cultural production, perhaps closer in this respect to modern music than to modern publishing. In any case, the shaykhs of Damascus could no more expect to be “freed” by the printing press than modern musicians were liberated by the phonograph record. “Education” and “book production” thus reveal themselves as aspects of the same group of ritual and performative practices, rather than formal domains.

Were debates over the relationship of books to memory connected to the struggle for mansabs? There is some evidence in the sources that the increasing social value of acquired texts made the instrumental use of books a subject for disagreement. Ibn al-Hājj argued: “If the stipend (ma'lūm) of one of us is cut off he resents it and says, if he is a beginner, ‘how can I be cut off when I have read the book of so and so and have memorized such and such?’ We see students among us say, ‘how could so and so receive such and such when I am of greater discernment and understanding, and have memorized more books and narratives (riwāya)?’ And the older students compete with their contemporaries for mansabs in lecturing; such positions come only from standing at the door of the powerful. So how can he gain enlightenment? We study because of stipends.”²⁴² One possibility is that the sources condemned solitary reading so vehemently precisely because the struggle for mansabs detached texts from the ritual nature of their transmission. It also threatened the monopoly of shaykhs over the transmission of knowledge. This was also partly true in Sung education, in which teachers had ritual roles, were concerned with moral cultivation, and saw the examination system as a threat to the neo-Confucian ideals they inculcated into the young.²⁴³

Given the importance they attached to the incorporation of paths of transmission of texts, it is not surprising that Damascenes devoted a substantial literature to their intellectual ancestors. The *mashyakha* or *mu'jam* was a genre that listed the shaykhs with whom an individual had studied, or heard ḥadīth from, and many of the important shaykhs of the city either had one or were subjects of one.²⁴⁴ Biographies (tarjama) and biographical dictionaries

²⁴² Ibn al-Hājj, 1/18–19. ²⁴³ Chafee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 186.

²⁴⁴ Often written on the occasion of the death of a shaykh, for example Ibn Kathir, 14/185. See Şafadi, *al-Wāfi*, 13/80 for a seventeen-volume *mashyakha* written by Birzālī for one of the Banū Şaşra; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/263 for another written by Birzālī for Tāj al-Dīn al-Firkāh in ten small volumes. For a “thick” *mashyakha* as a positive attribute of a shaykh see Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/159. For the terms *mashyakha* and *mu'jam* used interchangeably see Ibn Kathir, 13/337. On *mashyakhas* and *majmū'as* the fundamental work has been done by G. Vajda, but scholars have been largely uninterested in their social or cultural uses: see G.

(*tabaqāt*) were popular books, and many of the important shaykhs of the cities both wrote biographies and had biographies written of them.²⁴⁵ Although only the major *tabaqāt* and a few smaller biographies of great shaykhs have survived, a fairly large number of the shaykhs in the city wrote *tarjamas* of their contemporaries. As large numbers of shaykhs from Iran and the Jazīra settled in the city in the Ayyūbid period, there was a demand for biographies of the shaykhs in lines of transmission emanating from those places.²⁴⁶

Such biographies in some respects represented the “real” history of the city as much as documents did in European cities. The *a‘yān* of Damascus took few measures to ensure the survival of documents, save those which testified to their positions within a chain of transmission. However, they exerted themselves daily to preserve the memory of shaykhs through whom ‘ilm passed. They rarely flourished documents other than *ijāzas* as proof of status or honor, but moment by moment they brandished the names, gestures, anecdotes, and texts of their shaykhs. The *a‘yān* did not see themselves as members of institutions or formal groups, but rather as exemplars of great shaykhs living and dead. It was exemplarity, a quality of shaykhliness, rather than formal affiliation, that they looked to to secure themselves a place in the world. As the *a‘yān* acquired their critical intimacies and affiliations, they gained their social honor more from the incorporation of the *adab* and *baraka* of their shaykhs than their bloodlines.

The lecture, the transmission of *hadīth* and of books, and of everyday interactions among students and their teachers were in these respects less a form of higher education as we see it in other societies than a set of ritual and initiatory practices. The bond with the shaykh initiated the young person into the *adab* of the learned shaykh, a set of acquired dispositions that scripted virtually every aspect of daily life. The student–teacher relationship was thus also a master–disciple relationship.

When young people mastered a text with a shaykh, or attended a lecture, or “served” the shaykh as in his *suḥba*, the subject matter of education – the texts they studied – was in some respects arbitrary. There were no canons of privileged texts, or the lists of books characteristic of European universities, for the same reason that there were no degrees or professional qualifications:

Vajda, “La liste d’autorités de Manṣūr Ibn Sālim Wajīh al-Dīn al-Hamdānī,” *JA* 253 (1965), 341–406; G. Vajda, “Un magnus damascain du VIIe/XIIe siècle,” *JA* 245 (1957); G. Vajda, *Les certificats de lecture*; and his collected articles in Variorium reprint, N. Cottart ed., *La transmission du savoir en Islam (VIIIe–XVIIIe siècles)* (London, 1983); Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 33–4; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 375–6.

²⁴⁵ For one example among many see the biography of Ibn Qudāma: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 6/36. Books were also written as accounts of a shaykh’s *majālis*, or of his words and deeds: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 5/11.

²⁴⁶ For example, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 642/1244–5), a shaykh from the Jazīra who had studied in Khurasān, wrote a *Tabaqāt al-fuqaha* in which he related the biographies of the great shaykhs of the Jazīra, Khurasān, and Iran more generally to his associates and students in Damascus. He wrote that his motive for composing it was “ma‘rifā al-insān bi‘ahwāl al-‘ulāma” – “informing the people about the lives of the learned,” Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *Tabaqāt al-Fuqaha*, Hamidiye MS, 537.

there were no state or corporate bodies to mandate them. When some books were read more often than others, it was because these were the books that their shaykhs carried, and that they themselves in turn passed on. More important for the long-term strategies of the *a'yān* was the latent "curriculum," which permitted the young to incorporate the bodily norms, ritual competencies, and performative techniques of older and more powerful men.

The cult of the well-groomed personality was characteristic of elites throughout agrarian civilizations, and indeed has begun only recently to lose its importance (or change its form) in some areas of the modern world. But compared to the high medieval Middle East, in the other places we have considered correct manners and a sense of style were accompanied by formal mechanisms of social survival. What makes high medieval Damascus different was that exemplarity and the loyalties created by the same ritual and mimetic practices that produced it constituted the most reliable coin of the *a'yān*'s survival.

CHAPTER 5

Truth, error, and the struggle for social power

This chapter addresses how law or *shari'a* intersected with other social and cultural practices. Medieval Islamic societies are often thought to be unique in the extent to which elites took their social authority from sacred law, just as Islam is thought to be uniquely legalistic. On the surface, there is much to recommend this view. There is no doubt that the *a'yān* learned the sciences of the *shari'a* partly to qualify themselves as exponents of sacred law. Moreover, the all-encompassing nature of the *shari'a*, which included matters of cult, ethics, and family relations in addition to criminal, commercial, and administrative law, meant that legal forms of authority and argumentation were applied to many areas of social life. Finally, the representative social type of the civilian elite is often thought to be the *qādī* or *mufti*, whose position and authority were derived largely from knowledge of the law. Secretaries too were advised to become learned in the law so they would not be dependent as the *muqallad* or follower of a legal scholar.¹ There would thus seem to be little reason to reject the widespread characterization of Islamic societies as "nomocracies."

However, there are at least two reasons to qualify this perception. First, the extent to which the *a'yān*'s cultivation of law distinguished Islamic societies from others is at least debatable. As Weber pointed out, in a number of agrarian societies in which elites competed for prebends they cast themselves as carriers and interpreters of sacred law.² Second, even when the *a'yān*'s social struggles were cast in legal terms, their struggles for authority and prestige among themselves, and vis-à-vis others, often had little to do with the *shari'a* in the strictest sense. The legal aspect of their social power is perhaps both less unique and less comprehensive than scholars have generally recognized. In concentrating on the legal capacity of the learned elite, we may have overlooked or downplayed other uses of their knowledge.

Rather than contribute to the already large body of literature on the legal roles and functions of the *a'yān*, this chapter suggests that we might interpret

¹ See Ibn al-Firkāh, *Kitāb Sharḥ wa-iqrār Imām al-Haramayn*, BN MS 1226 Arabe, 178a-179b.

² Weber, "The Chinese Literati," 126; Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. II, 784-808.

the practices by which the learned elite made use of their knowledge in social struggles among themselves and against others. It covers two related issues. It first examines how the a‘yān imagined the social world and the nature of social competition. It then interprets how the a‘yān made use of their control over law and knowledge in social competition.

‘Ilm and making social hierarchies

To amīrs and a‘yān both, status, power, and wealth were prizes won through competitive struggle. The sources described the marks of distinction of both groups in similar language. Amīrs and civilian elites alike were shuyūkh, khawāṣṣ, a‘yān, and akābir (elders, elites, notables, and grandees).³ As the military were “lords of the sword” (*arbāb as-sayf*), the civilian elite were also “lords,” either of the pen or of the stipendiary posts (*arbāb al-qalam* or *arbāb al-manāṣib*).⁴ Shaykhs represented leadership with language taken from warriors, such as the waqf established for the “amīr of the Ḥanbalīs” (amīr al-ḥanābila), and the shaykh described as the “sūltān of the learned” (sūltān al-‘ulamā').⁵

The a‘yān also portrayed distinction and social competition in the language of military heroism. Scholars were the “swords of God in Syria” (suyūf Allah fi sh-shām), and shaykhs were the “standard-bearers” of their fields, madhabs, or groups.⁶ The scholars of a field of knowledge were its “horsemen” (*fāris*) or “armies” (*juyūsh*), and their words were “the swords of books.”⁷ Ḥadīth scholars described themselves as “a little troop, few in number, low on supplies.”⁸ Learned heroes were dubbed the “swords of the theologians” (*sayf al-mutakallimīn*), the “swords of debaters” (*sayf al-munāẓirīn*), and the “horsemen of the Ḥanbalīs.”⁹ Damascenes also associated great scholars with legendary heroes such as ‘Antar and Marwān Ibn al-Ḥakam.¹⁰ They imagined

³ For amīrs as shaykhs see Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 102a; for the a‘yān al-umarā' see *ibid.*, 89a; Yūnīnī, 3/46, 238.

⁴ For examples of the *arbāb as-sayf* contrasted to the *arbāb al-manāṣib* or *arbāb al-qalam*, see Ibn Wāṣil, 4/228; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāṣiṭ*, 13/190. Such martial metaphors also described scholarly competition in the Latin West; see for example the honorific of Abelard as the “chevalier de la dialectique”: Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 130.

⁵ For the amīr al-ḥanābila see Nu‘aymī, 2/99. For the honorific sūltān al-‘ulamā', applied to Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, see Subkī, *Mu‘id al-nī‘am*, 70. Leadership of other groups was expressed through the term sūltān: for the term sūltān al-‘ārifīn (sūltān of the ṣūfīs), see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāṣiṭ*, 4/219; for the sūltān al-harāfiṣh see W. M. Brinner, “The Significance of the Ḥarāfiṣh and their Sūltān,” *JESHO* 6 (1963), 190–215.

⁶ For the “swords of God” see Jazārī, BN MS, 240; for standard-bearers of fields or groups see Ibn Kathīr, 14/40, 137; Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥāfi, Köp. MS, 5, 11; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/72 of the Cairo edition; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/251–2.

⁷ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/217, 227, 251. See also Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/158, for the “furūsiyya” or horsemanship of a scholar in his field.

⁸ “Hum shirdhima qalilatul-‘adad da‘ifatul-‘udad”: Ibn al-Ṣalāh, *Muqaddima*, 76.

⁹ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāṣiṭ*, 1/243, 21/253; Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 30b; Ibn Ḥajar, 1/160.

¹⁰ Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 199a; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāṣiṭ*, 4/214.

competition for status and position through metaphors taken from the hippodrome.¹¹ A debate was a duel in the lists, an argument a sword or a knife. The debater triumphed with the “sword of eloquence,” “slashing through obscurities men of the sword have never known,” finally “killing the feeble-minded opponent.”¹² A scholar “unsheathed the sword of the tongue of eloquence to make war on his opponent.”¹³ Through such symbolic equivalencies shaykhs and amīrs imagined dominance and distinction in similar terms.

Because Damascus had no “natural” or bureaucratic social hierarchies, and because there was no educational system to reproduce existing social divisions, the aṣyān continuously renegotiated status among themselves. One striking quality of the authors of the biographical dictionaries and their subjects (who were often enough intimates of the authors), was the effort they put into ranking the world and its inhabitants. Both the authors of the sources and their subjects as they describe them learned to imagine the world in hierarchies. The aṣyān sorted out hierarchies among themselves based on their learning in a wide variety of fields, and on their skill in practices such as lecturing, debate, and writing fatwās.¹⁴

At the top of a hierarchy of relations to ʿilm was leadership or dominance (riyāsa or imāma; or *rāasa*, *fāqa*, or *sāda* when expressed in verbal form).¹⁵ Riyāsa of course was also a quality the military tried to acquire.¹⁶ Being the dominant authority in a field could make a shaykh the *mushār ilayhi*, the “authority of reference.”¹⁷ Riyāsa often was an honorific and not a recognized position (physicians appear to be an exception), such as the “leadership of the learned” (riyāsa al-‘ulamā’)¹⁸ said to have characterized Ibn Jamā‘a, or the “leadership of the universe” (imāmatu’d-dunyā) attributed to the father of

¹¹ For example, Subkī, *al-Rasā'il al-Subkiyya*, 94; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/160.

¹² Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/61–2; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/227; Nu‘aymī, 1/248. ¹³ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/61.

¹⁴ Ibn Kathīr, 14/141. For riyāsa in medicine, see Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 72; for uses of the verbal forms *fāqa* and *sāda* see Ibn Kathīr, 13/325 and Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, Kōp. MS, 11. For an example of riyāsa in calligraphy see Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 20.

¹⁵ Cf. riyāsa in the Buyid Iran and ʿIrāq: Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 129–50. See also Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 129–33. To Makdisi, riyāsa was a formal status: “The system whereby the fitness of a candidate to teach could be determined . . . is to be found in the institution of riyāsa”. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 130. According to Makdisi, riyāsa was attained through skill in disputation: “No one could claim riyāsa without mastering the new art.” By restricting riyāsa to the madrasa, and by claiming that madrasas went only to those who mastered *jadál*, Makdisi intends to advance his argument that madrasas dominated intellectual life, and that lecturers were a social and occupational type. However well his formulation may work for other places, in Damascus there were many people who had riyāsa in one field or another without an appointment in a madrasa; and in madrasas there were many people who had appointments without riyāsa in anything being attributed to them. Disputation was rarely associated with riyāsa, though there were people who had riyāsa in disputation, as in other fields. See also Makdisi, “Ṣuhba et riyāsa,” 207–11. Riyāsa was the term for leadership in most fields and groups. Physicians had a *ra’is at-ṭibb*, who was appointed by the sultān: Qalqashandi, 12/6–7. Leadership of the Jewish community of Syria was also understood as riyāsa: *ibid.*

¹⁶ See Nu‘aymī, 1/218 for an example of al-Malik al-Muṣaffar’s riyāsa.

¹⁷ Yūnīnī, 3/95; Nu‘aymī, 1/227.

Ibn Daqīq al-īd.¹⁸ Following *riyāsa* in status was having a leading position (*tagaddum*). Scholars could also have a “share” (*mushāraka*) in a field like the “share” in a *mansab* or an *iqṭā'*. Where civilian elites reckoned the “share” to be a mediocre distinction, or a compromise between rivals, to the military a share in a field of knowledge was a mark of high prestige.¹⁹ At the bottom of this scheme of classification was having a taste (*dhawq*) for a field of knowledge.²⁰

Perhaps the most desirable sign of status, and a fixed target of social struggle, was fame or renown (*shuhra*, *dhikr*, *sam'a* – also *sum'a* – and *ṣīt*). A'yan and amīrs alike regarded having a name that extended beyond the city or better still beyond Syria as one of the surest marks of social distinction.²¹ The a'yan as a group were occasionally referred to as “the famous” (*al-mashāhir*).²² The sources were alert to the first signs of celebrity, and described gaining a reputation outside the city as a stage in a scholarly career.²³ A young man “flashed his merit like a bright star rising on the horizon.”²⁴ Another saw his name “fly to the horizons, to fill the regions of the earth, and soar above the universe.”²⁵

This attention to fame was not merely the meaningless repetition of literary commonplaces. The biographical dictionaries enumerated in detail areas in which their subjects were famous.²⁶ When shaykhs composed their own biographies they paraded the first signs of their fame as an all-important mark of distinction. An anecdote Abū Shāma recounted of his own birth allows us to see how fame was seen by shaykhs themselves, and not just by their biographers, as a mark of social honor. When he was a boy, Abū Shāma informed his readers, he took unusual pleasure in his lessons. When acquaintances expressed surprise at the joy he took in learning, his mother had a ready answer: “Do not be surprised. When I was pregnant with him, I dreamt that I was at the top of a minaret delivering the call to prayer. When I mentioned this to an acquaintance, he said, ‘you will give birth to a male child, whose fame will spread throughout the earth.’”²⁷ Fame rather than title was also the marker of

¹⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, 1/39; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/19. See also the “*riyāsatu'd-dīn w'ad-dunyā*” attributed to Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn 'Asākir: Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 61.

¹⁹ For example, a learned governor of the city, founder of a madrasa, had a *mushāraka* in various fields of knowledge: Nu'aymī, 169–70; al-Malik al-Amjad had a share in the sciences he had studied: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 12/6. ²⁰ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 5/15.

²¹ See for a few examples the soldier who had *ṣīt* among the Franks: Yūnīnī, 4/56; the princes of the “people of disbelief” (*ahl al-kufr*) fear the *sum'a* of mamlūk amīrs: Qalqashandī, 12/15; for “famous” amīrs of Damascus, including one “famous for horsemanship,” see Ṣafadī, *A'yan*, 89a, 89b. For examples of scholarly fame see Yūnīnī, 3/14; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/31; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/19; Jazārī, BN MS, 369. ²² For one example see Ibn al-Dawādārī, 9/23.

²³ See Ṣafadī, *A'yan*, 200a; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Tabaqāt*, 4/283; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/245; Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 14. ²⁴ Ṣafadī, *A'yan*, 125b.

²⁵ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/156; for a similar expression, “his name flew to fill the regions,” see Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 21.

²⁶ For one example, see Yūnīnī 4/101 for an enumeration of the fields in which a scholar had *ṣīt*.

²⁷ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 38. For other dreams of fame on the part of parents see Ibn Khallikān, 2/331, 325.

social capacity. Someone in need of a *fatwā* or medical care, or who desired to learn a certain field of knowledge, sought out not a specific office but an individual “famous” in the field.²⁸ With fame, as with so many other aspects of the struggle for status, pedigreed, certified, or chartered capacity was of little use; rather, it was an acquired honorific that was the object of competitive struggle.

As is often the case in elite struggles for scarce markers of status, some stood on their dignity and represented themselves as above the fray. Most, however, had an ambiguous relationship to self-assertion. On the one hand, acquiring *‘ilm* for the sake of fame was denounced as a misappropriation of learning for worldly ends.²⁹ On the other, self-assertion was expected and often lauded as a virtue: of *amīrs* and *‘ulama’* the highest praise was: “No one equaled him, and no one opposed him in anything he did.”³⁰

Ranking

Without formal distinctions of rank or birth, Damascenes were all the more alert to subtle gradations in prestige. The biographical dictionaries rated people against others, and reported on how people rated one another. As there were few formal distinctions of status, much less inherited ones, prestige was an elusive prize of competitive struggle. Examining their subjects for signs of superiority, the sources seized upon any indication of it, including everyday activities such as prayer.³¹ In many entries, “surpassing [one’s] contemporaries” was represented as the object of social labor.³² As always, we can never know whether specific individuals in fact possessed the qualities attributed to them, but the abundant use of these terms in the sources demonstrates that the *a‘yān* understood their struggles in such language.

Such honorifics could have immediate practical uses, and appointments to *mansabs* often mentioned them. The appointment of Ibn Khallikān to the *tadrīs* of the *Amīniyya* referred to him as “the unique one who has no peer (*al-awḥad alladhi lā nazīr lahu*).”³³ In a competition over the *tadrīs* of the *Khātūniyya*, one party had the “imāms of Syria” write out a document on his behalf, which they loaded with his praises.³⁴ The praises that occupy so much space in the biographical dictionaries thus were not merely literary commonplaces, nor did they merely reflect social struggle: they were objects of it.³⁵

²⁸ For an example of fame for knowing a particular text, see *Yūnīnī*, 3/75; see also *Subkī*, *Tabaqāt*, 6/31 for a famous marginal commentary. For seeking out *qādīs* and others “famous” for their *fatwās*, see *Şafadī*, *al-Wāfi*, 22/449. See *Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a*, 637, 672, for “famous” physicians. ²⁹ *Ibn Jamā‘a*, 19.

³⁰ For *amīrs* see *Yūnīnī*, 3/46; also *Ibn Khallikān*, 1/165; see *Şafadī*, *A‘yān*, 141b, for a secretary who had killed “any who opposed him”; for civilians see *Subkī*, *Tabaqāt*, 6/174.

³¹ For example, “I never saw anyone pray as well as he”: *Dhahabī*, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 14.

³² For *faqā ahl ḥasrihi*, see *Yūnīnī*, 3/79; for an example of *sāda ahlā zamānihi* see *Ibn Kathir*, 13/12. ³³ *Yūnīnī*, 4/143. ³⁴ *Ibn Hajar*, 1/43.

³⁵ For a later example of how such praise figured in a suggested format for an *ijāza* see *Qalqashandī*, 14/322.

The biographical dictionaries ranked many of their subjects in hierarchies, including ascetics, soldiers, scholars of all types, and artists and musicians.³⁶ The terms *‘adīm al-nazīr* (without peer), *wahīd dahrihi* (the unique of his age), *aḥdhaq an-nās* (the most intelligent of the people), *awḥad* (the unique), *ashar ahl zamānihi* (the most famous of the people of his time), *afḍal aqrānihi* (the best of his contemporaries), *awḥad al-‘aṣr* (the unique of the age), *farīd ad-dahr* (the singular of the age), *baraka al-waqt* (the baraka of the age), *baraka al-‘ilm* (the baraka of ‘ilm), *a‘lam aṣrīhi ‘ilman* (the most learned of his time in ‘ilm), *shaykh al-waqt* (the shaykh of the age), *sayyid ahl al-islām fī zamānihi* (the leader of the people of Islam in his time) appear so frequently in the biographical dictionaries that they became the points around which narratives were constructed.³⁷ Even in death shaykhs were rated against others, as their funerals were objects of competitive ranking.³⁸ Many who merited more than a cursory line or two in a death-notice were said to be the best, the unique, the singular, in one field or another. One reason for the existence of the genre was to provide a means by which carriers of ‘ilm in the past as in the present could be rated.³⁹

After listing several such honorifics, biographers often proceeded to a more expanded version of them. ‘He surpassed the people of his age in the East and the West (fāqa ahl zamānihi sharqan wa-gharban).’⁴⁰ ‘He carried the day against all of his contemporaries (ḥāzā qasaba’s-sabq).’⁴¹ ‘He surpassed the minor and the major (fāqa al-asāghir w’al-akābir) with respect to ‘ilm.’⁴² One entry referred to ‘the unique of his time in the number of his fields (awḥad zamānihi fī ta‘addud al-faḍā’il).’⁴³ In many death-notices, such rankings took up the greater part of an entry, and they occasionally fill long passages. Subkī for example wrote two-and-a-half dense pages comparing his father to dozens of other scholars.⁴⁴

Such honorifics were not just ‘formulas,’ as scholars who have waded through the biographical dictionaries have occasionally dismissed them. It is true that we often do not know whether an honorific attributed to a single individual in the sources was in fact applied to him by his contemporaries –

³⁶ See Yūnīnī, 3/135 for an example of ranking of ascetics by their piety. For ranking of musicians see the punning praise of a fiddler: ‘lam yakun ka-man rāḥ wa-lā ka-man ja’ (of those who came and went, there was no one like him), playing off kamanjā, the two-string fiddle: Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 9a. For ranking of a calligrapher see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāṣṭ*, 10/259. For a complex ranking of the ḥadīth scholars of the city see Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/252.

³⁷ For these, which constitute a small number of the total, see Jazārī, BN MS, 69–71, 194; Abū Shāmā, *Dhayl*, 131; Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 5, 15; Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, BL MS, 6, 7; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāṣṭ*, 4/144, 21/340, 349; Ibn Rajab, 2/307, 308; Nu‘aymī, 1/226. These were applied to different fields of knowledge, including medicine: see Ibn Abī Usaybi‘a, 636, 646, 661, 663 for physicians known as ‘the unique of his age (awḥad zamānihi)’ in medicine and in other fields such as time-keeping and astronomy. ³⁸ See for example Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/216.

³⁹ See for one example Ṣafadī, *al-Wāṣṭ*, 11/420. ⁴⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 13/71.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13/325. ⁴² Ibn Shākir, 21/261.

⁴³ Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 16. See Kazimirski for ‘science’ in the French sense as one of the meanings of the word *faḍā’il*.

⁴⁴ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/179–82; in Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 18–19, he quoted a long passage from Ṣafadī’s *A‘yān* comparing his father to others in rhyming prose.

though in the case of Damascus, because of its unusually detailed sources, often enough in fact we do. The possibility that an anecdote may be untrue is why scholars have been wary of these sources. That these honorifics were advantageous in social struggle, however, there should be no doubt – as can be seen in the effort the authors of our sources put into describing themselves with such language when given the opportunity. Both biographers and their subjects as they describe them struggled for such honorifics and often made use of them when they possessed them.

The very ubiquity of such honorifics in the sources shows that negotiating these terms was ingrained in the rhetorical forms by which the biographical dictionaries and their subjects represented the social universe. When biographers – and their subjects as they depicted them – described themselves and others, they were impatient with relations of equivalence. Again and again we see them struggling with orders of precedence. When a young person set out to learn ḥadīth, he should begin with the “best of his shaykhs with respect to their ‘ilm, their fame (shuhra), or their eminence (sharaf).”⁴⁵ An example of how this propensity to rank shaped the a‘yān’s experience of the world was the quandary one Damascene fell into and resolved in a dream. In his dream he encountered his brother, who had been dead for a year. When he learned that his brother resided in the garden of Eden, he could only think to ask him: “Which of the two is better, the Ḥāfiẓ ‘Abd al-Ghanī or Abū ‘Umar?” He was referring to two brothers of the Banū Qudāma, both known for their piety, learning, and asceticism, whom it would have been difficult to rank. The brother replied: “I do not know, but in the case of the Ḥāfiẓ, a chair is set up for him every Friday beneath the divine throne (*al-irsh*), and ḥadīth are read to him, and pearls and jewels are scattered upon him.”⁴⁶ Some a‘yān even ranked their children, and others their ancestors, as in the shaykh who wrote that his grandfather was “greater” than his father.⁴⁷

Such rankings also compared the living to their dead exemplars. Subkī wrote of a shaykh, in punning Arabic whose full effect cannot be conveyed: “In *tafsīr*, he was the imprisonment of Ibn ‘Atiyya, and the fall of al-Rāzī into disaster (*razi‘a*); in *qirā’at* he was the exile of al-Dānī, and the impoverishment of al-Sakhawī . . . in ḥadīth – what a catastrophe for Ibn ‘Asākir, and as for al-Khaṭīb (al-Baghdādī), better not to mention it; in *uṣūl*, how dull was Fakhr al-Dīn (al-Rāzī’s) sword-edge, and how his excellence was tormented by injustice; in *fiqh* [he was] the perdition of al-Juwainī . . . and he pulled al-Rafī‘i to the depths; in logic he was the flight of Dabirān; in *khilāf* he was the destruction of al-Naṣafti.”⁴⁸ Damascenes also compared shaykhs to dead exemplars out of outrage at social failure. When al-Mizzī lost his manṣab at the dār al-ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya during a *fitna*, the shaykh who dismissed him said: “My skin crawled and my mind reeled. I said to myself, ‘this is the Imām of the muhādithūn! By God, if Dārulquṭnī were alive he would be ashamed to

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, 369. ⁴⁶ Ibn Rajab, 2/31.

⁴⁷ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 691; Jazārī, BN MS, 330. ⁴⁸ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/154.

give the lecture in his place!”⁴⁹ This constant comparison of the living with the dead was one way the a‘yān made use of the past to make sense of the present and secure the future.

The biographical dictionaries’ criteria of inclusion and ranking could become a subject of dispute. When Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a was composing his dictionary of physicians, one of his teachers came across a draft copy and complained that while Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī was included, others of greater virtue, himself included, were not.⁵⁰ In a world in which status shifted constantly, elites weighed and evaluated one another unendingly. The loyalties they nurtured over lifetimes could fracture in a single invidious comparison. Similarly, the conflicting imperatives between the instinct to rank and the experience of social bonds as ties of intimacy produced inevitable inner conflicts. On his death-bed a shaykh named ‘Alī told Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī that the absence of Tāj al-Dīn’s brother Ahmad was harder on him “than either his illness or his son’s absence.” Tāj al-Dīn continued: “And it reached him that my brother’s lectures were superior to his, so he said, ‘the lectures of Ahmad are better than the lectures of ‘Alī, and that in ‘Alī’s opinion is his highest hope.’”⁵¹ The resolution of this socially produced inner tension was in playing off the names of the people involved, as the Prophet Muhammad was known as Ahmad, and his son-in-law and cousin ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib could take second place in the normal course of things.

Social combat and the imagination of status in space

As there were few formal or “natural” criteria of social classification, the sources, and their subjects as they described them, were especially alert to the negotiation of status in the protocol of spatial arrangements. Shaykhs felt the need to work out hierarchies immediately, as one individual in each group had to have precedence in speaking, standing, sitting, and praying. Ibn Jamā‘a suggested how protocols of deference might be worked out in the lecture: “If the shaykh be [seated] in the middle . . . then the superior (*fadl*) of the group deserve to be on his [immediate] right and left; and if the shaykh should sit on the edge of a bench, then the most venerable and respected should be against the wall, or facing him. It is customary in the lecture-session (*majlis at-tadrīs*) for the most distinguished (*mutamayyizīn*) to sit facing the lecturer, and it is important for those in attendance (*al-rufaqqā*) to sit to one side in order that the shaykh may look upon them as a group during the explication (*sharh*) and not to have to single out one over the others.”⁵²

When shaykhs gathered in groups, they worked out the ever-shifting hierarchies among themselves. In the dars, for example, the lecturer should begin by “honoring all those present, dignifying the most notable among them

⁴⁹ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/253.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 647.

⁵¹ Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 36.

⁵² Ibn Jamā‘a, 148–9.

(afāḍilahum) by knowledge, age, piety, honor (sharaf), according to their precedence. He should be kind to the others and honor them by the excellence of his greeting. He should not disdain to rise for the most important among the people of Islām (akābir ahl al-islām) in order to honor them, as concerning the honoring of the ‘ulāma’ and seekers after knowledge (ṭalaba) there are many precedents.”⁵³ Without established protocols of deference, they made up their own as they struggled for precedence.⁵⁴

Such codes never assigned unambiguous meaning to each action, but were rather subject to rearrangement to express a variety of meanings. For example, traversing apparent hierarchies expressed “genuine” intimacy or esteem. We might note for this purpose a story Yūnīnī related of an amīr in Cairo. The amīr entered the house of another amīr, who was holding a session of samā‘. Observing his host’s entourage (khawāṣṣ) and mamlūks seated in the iwān, and a group of ṣūfīs (*fuqarā’*) seated in the courtyard, he paused and did not enter. He said to the owner of the house and to the amīrs: “You have made a mistake. It is the ṣūfīs who should be seated above, and you below.” The amīr would not enter until they exchanged places.⁵⁵ Another example of a paradoxical reversal of established protocols of deference was when the father of Yūnīnī, dining with Shaykh ‘Uthmān, a noted holy man, commenced to eat without waiting for the shaykh. When someone expressed surprise, Yūnīnī replied: “The point here is to obtain the baraka of Shaykh ‘Uthmān, so let us leave the decision of whether to eat to him.”⁵⁶ Thus he simultaneously expressed his esteem for the shaykh and cast himself in an exemplary light as defender of a deeper norm than the one his interlocutor invoked. This surprising contradiction of the expected order appears as a recurring mark of distinction or humiliation. One of the highest marks of social power was the capacity to invert or reverse expected hierarchical relations.⁵⁷

When chroniclers reported major events, they focused on the reflection of status in the relative positions of the participants. An account of an inaugural lecture given in the Ḵālidīya described the positions of the participants around the sultān according to their *wazīfas*.⁵⁸ The author then ranked the lecture in

⁵³ Ibn Jamā‘a, 33. See also *ibid.*, 152–3: “The student must treat those in attendance upon the shaykh with adab, for his good manners are for [the sake of] the shaykh, and respect for his majlis, for they are his companions (*rufaqā’*) . . . he should honor his superiors (*kubara’ahū*) by not sitting in the middle of the halqa, nor in front of anyone, except in case of necessity . . . He should not separate two friends (*rafiq*), nor two companions (*mutaṣahib*) except with their permission, and [nor should he sit] above someone who is superior to him (man *huwa awlā minhu*). When someone arrives, it is incumbent on those present to welcome him and to make a space for him; people should not crowd him out, or turn their sides or backs to him.”

⁵⁴ For one example see the Maliki chief qādī who demanded to sit above the other qādīs because of his age and his priority, presumably in office (“the date of his *hijra*,” also used to refer to the beginning of the service of warriors to their *ustādhs* or the sultān): Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 12a.

⁵⁵ Yūnīnī, 2/351. A similar story is related in Jazāri, BN MS, 496. ⁵⁶ Yūnīnī, 2/47.

⁵⁷ Anecdotes attesting to the power of the sultān to invert expected hierarchies are not rare in the sources. One anecdote intended to illustrate al-Kāmil’s sense of justice related that a squire complained of an injustice received at the hands of his *ustādh*. Al-Kāmil had them exchange cloaks and riding animals, and had the *ustādh* serve his squire for six months: Ibn Kathir, 13/149; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 1/194; Nu‘aymī, 2/279. ⁵⁸ Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 54–5.

relation to other audiences, concluding that only an audience held in 623/1226 equaled it.⁵⁹ Virtually the entire narrative consisted of rankings in space, in time, and in prestige. Another example of how this rhetoric of ranking structured historical narratives was the description of an audience held by Qalawūn. Accounts of the audience first described in detail the positions of the participants relative to one another, then showed how those positions were undermined. When Ibn Taymiyya, who enjoyed Qalawūn's esteem, entered the room, Qalawūn broke with established practice and walked across the room, took Ibn Taymiyya by the hand, and walked with him before praising him to the group.⁶⁰ Structuring narratives around the spatial arrangement of the participants, followed by the undermining or inversion of those arrangements, was one way elites charted ever-shifting status relationships and plotted their own movements within them.

Shaykhs organized not only themselves, but also things, through the same classificatory schemes. Throughout the sources, questions of priority appear again and again, addressed to a wide variety of objects. What city is the best, the most sacred, the most pious? Which field of knowledge is the most beneficial?⁶¹ Who was superior, 'Alī or Abū Bakr?⁶² In giving a series of lectures, which subject should have precedence?⁶³ When shaykhs discussed texts, they sought to determine the most correct version, and rated them as they rated shaykhs.⁶⁴ The elaborate practices applied to ranking texts and arranging them in space mirrored identical practices of ranking and arranging people, the ordering principles in both cases being their fame (*shuhra*), their benefit (*naf*), and their eminence (*sharaf*). As Ibn Jamā'a described them, these practices were both precise and emphatic:

Books should be stored in the order of precedence of [first] the field of knowledge they belong to, [second] their eminence (*sharaf*), [third] their authors, and [fourth] their excellence. The most eminent should be placed above the rest, and then the others [follow] by order of precedence. If there is a Qur'ān among them, it should occupy the place of precedence . . . then books of ḥadīth, then interpretation of the Qur'ān, then interpretation of ḥadīth (*tafsīr al-ḥadīth*), then dogmatic theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*), then jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). If two books pertain to the same branch of knowledge, then the uppermost should be the one containing the most quotations from the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. If they are equivalent in that respect, then [the criterion is] the prestige (*jalāla*) of the writer. If they are equal in that respect, then [the criterion is] the most correct of them.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* ⁶⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 14/52, 53; Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, Kōp. MS, 98–9.

⁶¹ Ibn al-Šalāh, *Muqaddima*, 75 for a claim that the ḥadīth scholarship was "the best of the excellent sciences (*afḍal al-‘ulūm al-faḍila*); the most beneficial of the beneficial fields of knowledge."

⁶² See Ibn Khallikān, 2/322, for a struggle in Baghdaḍ between sunnīs and shī'a over the question, eventually calmed by Ibn al-Jawzī, who cast the solution to the question in the form of a riddle that allowed both sides to believe their claims vindicated.

⁶³ One suggested order went as follows: first *tafsīr*, then *hadīth*, *uṣūl al-dīn*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *khilāf*, *nahw*, and *jadal*: Ibn Jamā'a, 35–6. ⁶⁴ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣrāt*, 8/671.

⁶⁵ Ibn Jamā'a, 171. Al-Zarnūjī suggested a simpler form of ranking: *tafsīr* should be placed over all other books, and no book should be placed above the Qur'ān: Zarnūjī, 35.

These practices of classification were especially important in a society in which status was the prize of negotiation, assertion, and struggle. They did not only reflect the social world: learning to classify was a necessary skill of social combat. The talent of classification, the distinguishing of the higher from the lower, the inner from the outer, and the better from the worse, thus extended to many objects and practices within the scope of the a‘yān’s vision. As both an object and a tool of social labor, this way of seeing was also a skill of social action.

There was another consequence to the necessity of acquiring status on one’s own. Distinction was seen as the reward of labor, not of any intrinsic quality. The learned elite had no cult of “natural” intelligence or genius. What they valued was a form of knowledge, and a form of deportment associated with it, that subjected the young to agony. As one shaykh advised: “He who knows not the pain of learning will never taste the pleasure of ‘ilm.”⁶⁶ In the ancient world, where a notable’s dignity depended on his reputation as a “man of leisure,” the cultivation of knowledge was known by terms such as *otium* derived from words meaning ease or leisure. Medieval Muslims by contrast stressed the laborious nature of learning. Students were known as *mushtaghlūn* – those who labor, as teaching was *ishghāl* or *ishtīghāl*, making students work.⁶⁷ Writers cherished signs of exhaustion in their subjects. A poem Abū Shāma quoted in praise of himself went: “O envious ones! He (Abū Shāma) is one who exhausted himself, as a boy, a youth, and a man with the incessant labor of study.”⁶⁸ Zarnūjī warned his readers that becoming a shaykh required labor: “Who desires advancement without fatigue wastes his life in quest of the absurd.”⁶⁹ The sources fixed on signs of fatigue that left their marks on the bodies of the learned, such as the scholar’s weak eyesight – a prize of “too much reading and weeping.”⁷⁰ When Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī arrived at the dār al-ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya, he “was on the point of exhaustion,” from “rousing the students from the couches of indolence.”⁷¹ The a‘yān of Damascus had no cults of the “natural” distinction and taste of hereditary aristocracies or the “giftedness” of the modern upper middle classes. They acquired their distinction through labors that took the self and its presentation as their objects.

‘Ilm, error, and fitna

The a‘yān of Damascus were as alert to error as aristocrats elsewhere were to points of honor. Chroniclers and biographers described many edifying

⁶⁶ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, 692.

⁶⁷ For one example of the common use of this term see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/194.

⁶⁸ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 41.

⁶⁹ Zarnūjī, 39. The remainder of the passage reads: “No gain of riches is possible without difficulties that you must take upon yourself. Hence, how is it possible for learning [to be acquired without difficulty]? . . . It is by much hard work that you will gain the highest distinction. Therefore, he who seeks learning stays awake at night.”

⁷⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 13/39. ⁷¹ Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 14–15.

struggles against error. One exemplar of vigilance against error was the shaykh who heard a mistake in the recitation of the Qur’ān at his own funeral, and revived long enough to correct it.⁷² A similar story was told of the great ḥadīth scholar al-Mizzī, who would awaken instantly from a nap to correct any error, “as though someone had awakened him.”⁷³ An especially revealing incident was the interrogation in 718/1318–19 of a shaykh concerning an error he made in a dream. In the aftermath he was forbidden to deliver fatwās or contract marriages.⁷⁴ Questions of truth and error have a social dimension in many societies; in Damascus, where the a‘yān derived their power and social honor largely from their learning, there were few social antagonisms that were not also experienced as conflicts between the sound and the specious.

As the a‘yān made frequent written and oral productions extemporaneously, in every performance there lurked the possibility of a public and humiliating error.⁷⁵ Error-free performances were difficult for several reasons. One was the challenge of reciting unpointed and grammatically difficult Arabic texts.⁷⁶ Another was that much of the learning of the ‘ulamā’ consisted of memorized lists of relatively random words, especially genealogies and isnāds.⁷⁷ Blunders in spelling, pronunciation, or recitation of one of these motley lists brought humiliation.⁷⁸ One of the main objects of working on texts with shaykhs was to give elites the knack or practical know-how of making successful “spontaneous” performances out of such challenging material. The biographical dictionaries repeatedly praised scholars for reciting memorized texts without error.⁷⁹ This is also one reason why mastery of grammar was so important to them. Knowledge of grammar was a critical skill not just in understanding or composing texts, but also in these performances that tested the a‘yān’s social honor.⁸⁰

Alertness to error, and the uses of error as the point of honor in elite social

⁷² Yūnīnī, 4/183. ⁷³ Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/252. ⁷⁴ Ibn Kathīr, 14/88.

⁷⁵ Errors in fatwās were taken with a seriousness that could be deadly, as in the case of the shaykh who was nearly executed for errors in his fatwā: Ibn Kathīr, 14/35.

⁷⁶ For an example of how a slip in Arabic grammar could be disastrous, see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/20. The recitation of a long or difficult work without error was a somewhat heroic event, and if successful could figure in an individual’s death-notice. See Ibn Kathīr, 14/149 for a series of nine majālis in which Muslim’s *Sahīḥ* was read without error. Delivering the khutba was also a dangerous performance. See for one example the khaṭīb praised for making his way through the khutba “without hesitating or stuttering”: Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 1/56.

⁷⁷ See for example the shaykh Abū Shāma ridiculed for getting his own genealogy wrong: Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 189. Yūnīnī, 2/428 also related an account of someone who got his ancestry wrong. For examples of how errors in ḥadīth transmission were perceived see Ibn Rajab, 2/7; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 4/193; Nu‘aymī, 2/14.

⁷⁸ See for example the chief qāfi who pronounced the qāf as a hamza in a reading of the Qur’ān during Friday prayer, provoking al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam to laugh out loud and end the prayer: Ibn Wāsil, 4/172–3. See also the shaykh who misspelled two words in a text, provoking another shaykh to make two humiliating puns on his misspellings: Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 22/300.

⁷⁹ For one example see Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 201a: “wa-yunshidu mā yaḥfaṣuḥu jayyidān min ghayri laḥn wa-lā tāhīr.”

⁸⁰ For an example of how studying Zamakhsharī’s *Muṭassal* was expected to confer a kind of performative mastery, see the case of Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibn al-Wakīl, who was said to have made many solecisms even though he had studied the text: Ibn Kathīr, 14/80. Also Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/20.

competition, cut across the liminal and ritual character of the occasions in which knowledge was transmitted. Although ḥadīth were recited ideally without reference to a text, the possibility of error in a purely oral performance gave pause even to a distinguished shaykh. When ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ibn Qudāma was asked why he read ḥadīth from a text, he replied: “Because I fear surprises.”⁸¹ This ambiguity between the liminality of ritual and the agonism of public performance came out especially in the case of formal debates. Debates (*jadál, munāẓara*) were suspect because they excited a rancor incompatible with the ritual character of the transmission of knowledge, and because of their association with Hellenistic learning.⁸² An anecdote related of Dhahabī illustrates this point nicely. Tāj al-Dīn Subkī asked Dhahabī, his shaykh, to debate before his disciples. Dhahabī agreed only out of his “love” for his student and “for [Subkī’s] instruction.” In the event he allowed the students to select the subject of the debate (*mas’āla*), then told them to leave and study the problem. When they returned they found him reciting the Qur’ān with Jazarī, “the Ḥanbali.” The story illustrates three ways in which debate could be conceived as contrary to a shaykh’s true purpose in life. Dhahabī engaged in it out of deference to the duties of the master–disciple relationship; instead of preparing for it he occupied himself with an act of piety; and when his students came upon him he was with a Ḥanbali of the sort these students wanted to learn to refute.

However, in spite of the suspicion in which they were held, debates were also highly regarded because they were the most purely agonistic form of interaction among the learned elite.⁸³ Of all the cultural productions of the learned elite, formal debates best demonstrate this two-sided character of their interactions. When modern scholars have studied debate, they have concentrated on describing the rules that structured it and the relationship of debate to Hellenistic antecedents. However much formal debates were devoted to determining the true from the false, the sources were at least as interested in debates as contests of social honor between individuals. To Damascenes, the

⁸¹ Ibn Rajab, 2/7.

⁸² See Ibn Jamā`a, 40: “It is not appropriate for the people of ‘ilm to engage in competition or enmity, because these are the cause of aggression and anger. The goal of the meeting should be directed towards God, in order to bring benefit in this world and to obtain happiness in the hereafter.” See also Ibn Abī Uṣaybi`a, 693. For condemnations of *jadál* as Hellenistic, see Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 32, 217. When the Hellenistic sciences were suppressed, *jadál* was included with them. The chief qādī of the city once banned *jadál* along with logic, and tore up books about it in the presence of students: Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 137; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 32. For another description of *jadál* as a Hellenistic distraction “that gives no benefit,” see Ibn Kathīr, 13/237. Ibn Taymiyya wrote a tract entitled *The Book of Admonishing Intelligent Men from the Fabrication of Useless Jadál*. In it he admitted that the first Muslims (salaf) refuted heretics and innovators through debate, but he criticized *jadál* for its jargon, its elevation of suppositions into certainties, and its adducing as proofs everyday examples that do not constitute evidence: Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādi, Kōp. MS, 14.

⁸³ A debate could arise out of any formal majlis, as in the case of the visit of the four chief qādīs to a lecture where they debated with one of the shaykhs present: Ibn Hajar, 2/59. Debates were also arranged for visiting scholars, and were one way for those arriving in the city to gain a good reputation there: Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, Kōp. MS, 35.

debate was a kind of agonistic performance, similar to modern sports, in which points scored were at least as important to audience and participants as the rules by which the contest was regulated. As in the case of sport today, the disinterested outsider wants to know the rules of the game; but to participants and spectators what was important was the play on the field and the result.

Caustic replies to error were the basis of a cult of the deadly witticism (*ajwiba nādira* or *ajwiba laṭifa*) much like the cult of the *bon mot* in early modern European court society.⁸⁴ In a debate in Baghdaḍ in 605/1208–9, a shaykh quoted a ḥadīth containing a problematic preposition. Tāj al-Dīn al-Kindī interrupted and pronounced the preposition according to one school of thought. The shaykh turned to the wazīr and asked who his interlocutor was, and the wazīr responded: “He is one of the Kalb, so let him bark.”⁸⁵ The pun was so esteemed that it was lauded in poetry composed to commemorate the event and reported in chronicles written long afterwards.⁸⁶ In a later debate in Damascus, Kindī won victor’s laurels. A debate was arranged between him and a visiting shaykh from Cairo. After each party accused the other of error in the vocalization of a phrase, the debate degenerated. Kindī denied his opponent’s claim to an illustrious ancestry, saying that the ancestor he claimed had no issue. His opponent then tried to make a fool out of Kindī, at one point claiming: “I possess books the equal to Baghdaḍ in value.” Kindī responded: “That is impossible. There are no books in the world to equal Baghdaḍ. I, however, possess books the mere covers of which equal your neck!”⁸⁷ It was such anecdotes that were reported of debates, and that gave debaters the fame that was so much the object of social labor.⁸⁸ The formal structures of debate, which have occupied the greater part of scholarly attention, were perhaps less important to the audience or the participants than the contest they regulated.

Scholars described such competitions in the language of war. They glorified individuals skilled in debate with images of military heroism.⁸⁹ The debate was a battle, often glamorized as the “thick of debate” (*hawma al-baḥth*).⁹⁰

⁸⁴ The devastating *bon mot* was much appreciated at court in Cairo too: see for example Jazarī, BN MS, 420.

⁸⁵ Kindī, from which Tāj al-Dīn took his niṣba, was one of the tribes of Kalb, “dog” in Arabic.

⁸⁶ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 65. Ṣafadī, *al-Waṭf*, 15/53 carried a different version and described how the event set off a long rivalry. Other derisive puns were made by inverting the meaning of one part of an individual’s name. Ibn al-Muṭahhar, as noted below, note 101, was insulted as Ibn al-Munaijjas. Another was Ibn al-Mukhṭār, mukhṭār meaning “invested with the authority to judge or choose.” Inclined to philosophy and logic, he was the object of a witty versification: “Ibn al-Mukhṭār is not capable of independent judgment; rather, his unbelief is the result of his acceptance of the authority of unbelievers (laysa ‘bnu Mukhṭār fi kufrin bi-mukhṭār/ w’innamā kufruhu taqlid al-kufār)”: Ṣafadī, *al-Waṭf*, 5/15. For another example of praise for a caustic witticism see *ibid.*, 22/300. ⁸⁷ Yūnīnī, 2/428.

⁸⁸ For other examples see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣ’at*, 8/515; Ibn Kathir, 13/39.

⁸⁹ An especially common term was *fursān al-baḥth*: see Ṣafadī, *A’yān*, 203b. For a study of the pairing of the pen and the sword in literary debates see G.J. van Gelder, “The Conceit of Pen and Sword: On an Arabic Literary Debate,” *JSS* 32 (1987), 329–60.

⁹⁰ For two examples among many that could be cited, see Nu’aymī, 1/248, and Ṣafadī, *al-Waṭf*, 4/227.

Formal debates were “contests in the hippodrome,” the debater “galloping onto the field of eloquence,” attacking like the legendary hero ‘Antar, struggling against falsehood with ‘Ali’s legendary sword Dhū'l-faqār.⁹¹ Victory in debate was “striking the opponent with an arrow,” “cutting [him] off,” or “taking him to the impasse of surrender.”⁹² When a scholar set out to write a refutation (*radd*), he “unsheathed his sword.”⁹³ Refutations often sported a military image in their titles. Al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam’s tract against al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī was called *al-Sahm al-muṣīb fī al-radd ‘alā al-khaṭīb* (“The Bull’s-eye in Refutation of the Khaṭīb [al-Baghdādī]”).⁹⁴ Another *radd* was entitled *al-Sayf al-ṣaqīl fī al-radd ‘alā Ibn Zafil* (“The Burnished Sword in Refutation of Ibn Zafil”).⁹⁵

Such martial metaphors structured whole narratives of scholarly competition. In a 6,000-verse panegyric, Ibn Taymiyya was described in warlike images: “And I strike all who would strip God of His attributes (*kull mu‘aṭṭil*) with the sword of inspiration (*sayf al-wahī*), the blow of a holy warrior (*mujāhid*) . . . he who would enter the lists (*mā dhā yubārizu*), let him come forward! Or he who would contest me hand to hand in the hippodrome! . . . Fear not the tricks and snares of the enemy, for their manner of fighting is lies and slander. The soldiers of the followers of the Prophet are angels; and their soldiers are the troops of Satan.”⁹⁶ Accounts of his debates described them in the language of war. Between Ibn Taymiyya and an opponent in debate there were “military campaigns, battles Syrian and Egyptian,” which Ibn Taymiyya, the “brandished sword,” won, “with a single bow-shot.”⁹⁷ These martial images also entered decrees appointing shaykhs to manṣabs. When Muḥammad Ibn ‘Alī al-Miṣrī was appointed as lecturer and administrator of the Duwla‘īyya, the decree referred to him as a man who in the “thick of debate” “cuts through obscurities with proofs [sharper] than a sword.”⁹⁸ The appointment of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Alā‘ī described the ink that flowed through his pen as the blood that flows from a martyr.⁹⁹ The aptness of this language to describe social competition among civilians, and to construct a heroic narrative for civilian careers, was not merely metaphoric license; it was also because shaykhs identified with warriors as engaged in mortal combat.

In addition to these martial invocations, civilian elites also associated the true and the false with the pure and the polluted. As their productions of ‘ilm were “pure,” so did they conceive of error as ritual impurity. Scholars treated books that contained errors as pollutions, and washed – the term used was *ghasala*, a term often associated with ritual purity, as removing ritual

⁹¹ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 12/373; 4/214; Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 9.

⁹² Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/19; Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 55a–66b. ⁹³ Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6/151.

⁹⁴ Ibn Wāsil, 4/212; see Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6/124 for the image of the “bull’s-eye” in another title.

⁹⁵ Subkī, *al-Rasā‘il al-Subkiyya*, 81. ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, Köp. MS, 4; Ibn Hajar, 1/159. For more military metaphors describing Ibn Taymiyya’s skill in jadal see Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/19. ⁹⁸ Nu‘aymī, 1/248.

⁹⁹ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 13/415. For another use of this image in a decree appointing a shaykh to a manṣab see Qalqashandī, 12/15.

impurities required cold water – or burned them.¹⁰⁰ Debaters linked their opponents' errors or characters with ritual pollution.¹⁰¹ The association of error with pollution entered the titles of books, such as the refutation of Ibn Taymiyya entitled *The Purification of Knowledge from the Pollution of Belief*.¹⁰² Writers also represented struggles over the capacity to determine the true from the false as a form of purification. Ibn Taymiyya explained his debates and imprisonment in Egypt in a letter to Damascus: “[The relationship of a] believer to another believer is like one hand washing the other – the dirt is not carried away without a little roughness.”¹⁰³ This conflation of purity and pollution with truth and error appears again and again in the sources.

As the occasions in which knowledge was transmitted were stages for ritual performances, they were also arenas. Makdisi compared the debater to the gunfighter in the wild west, and some Damascenes did see their competitions in such a light.¹⁰⁴ However, where scholars have viewed these contests as formal competitions by which candidates for appointments were selected, there is not much evidence that debates in Damascus produced candidates for manṣabs. The connection between the formal debate and the manṣab was more indirect. Debates were one way a competitive group of elites demonstrated and tested their social honor – which could then be translated into a manṣab. They were the open and visible manifestation of a form of competition over social honor that made truth and error the contested matter.

Heresy and fitna

Although the contest over correct belief was one of the premier forms of social combat in the city, it remains poorly understood. One reason is that in Damascus, as in many other pre-Ottoman Islamic societies, heresy and orthodoxy were problematic categories: there were no state or corporate bodies that promulgated correct doctrine. In Damascus there were partisans of several systems of belief, including shī‘īs, philosophers, śūfīs of various kinds, Ḥanbalīs, practitioners of kalām, and even at least one partisan of Ibn

¹⁰⁰ See for example the shaykh who was publicly censured, and four of his books washed, at the Ḥādīliyya: Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, BL MS, 63. Books containing errors were burned in public in Baghdād: Abū Shāmā, *Dhayl*, 56. When a Shī‘ī opponent of Ibn Taymiyya died, a book was found in his effects that supported Jews and the “other corrupt religions (al-ādyan al-fāsida).” Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī washed it (ghasalahu): Ibn Kathīr, 14/101.

¹⁰¹ In the case of those who debated Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Hillī, his name especially invited puns (THR = purity), as in a poem Ibn Taymiyya composed around the time he wrote his refutation *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawīyya*: “w’abnu'l-muṭahhar lam taṭhur khalā'iqūh; dā'in ilā'r-rafqī ghālin fi't-ta'assub (and then there is Ibn al-Muṭahhar, whose character is not pure; he is an agitator for Shī‘īsm and excessive in ta'assub)”: Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 6/170; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 21/262; Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 30, attributed the second half of the line of verse to someone else’s long poem. Ibn Taymiyya was said to have referred to Ibn al-Muṭahhar as Ibn al-Munajjās (NJS = pollution): Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/19; 13/85.

¹⁰² *Taṭhīr al-fawā'id min danas al-iṭiqād*: Subkī, *al-Rasā'il al-Subkiyya*, 75.

¹⁰³ Ibn 'Abd al-Hādi, Köp. MS, 92. ¹⁰⁴ Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 133.

al-Rawandī.¹⁰⁵ Where accusations of false belief were implicit in their interactions, in general these groups lived peaceably if uncomfortably with one another, and they rarely coerced others to abandon their beliefs.

Another reason that the suppression of heresy is poorly understood is that scholars who have studied it have tended to stress the role of the state, of formal practices, and of specialized agencies in its suppression. E. Ashtor, the scholar who studied the suppression of heresy in the Mamlük period in greatest detail, saw it as a form of “inquisition” carried out by state “tribunals.” Ashtor attributed to the Mamlüks a conscious political strategy for the suppression of heresy: “One common trait in all these trials [of heretics] was the great role played by the government, which interfered incessantly in the affairs of the theologians . . . The court knew very well that in the East theological differences often ended in political or social movements, which could give fatal blows to governments.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Ashtor gave military and civilian elites defined spheres of jurisdiction and a division of political labor in the suppression of heresy: “The Turkish military aristocracy, reserving jurisdiction in criminal matters to itself, gave local judges the freedom to prosecute their enemies, who were also their own.” He saw the suppression of heresy carried out by “inquisition tribunals” which had a special “jurisdiction” because “ordinary judges did not have the right to judge crimes against the faith.”¹⁰⁷

Ashtor did an important service both in bringing these materials to light and in treating heresy as a social and political phenomenon. The most critical thing one might say of him is that he no more than others escaped the search for formal and permanent “public” institutions, especially those backed by the state and regulated by law, that have dominated European historiography on Europe and the world outside it. However, the inquisition tribunal, like the other formal domains of knowledge we have examined, is an object of our own creation. By formalizing the practices by which the capacity to define truth was contested, Ashtor like others mistook their social context and meaning.

Contrary to Ashtor’s description, there is no evidence for the existence of state or corporate bodies with jurisdiction over heresy. There were no suppressions of heresy by public entities. Rather, struggle over the capacity to define correct belief was understood as fitna or ‘aṣabiyya, as were other forms of elite competition in the city.¹⁰⁸ Fitna in this case as in others was the environment in which the logic of elite social competition must be interpreted.

One difficulty in understanding fitnas over belief and unbelief is the nature of the evidence. From the sources it is clear that there were dozens of fitnas over belief. Unfortunately, concerning most of these fitnas, we know next to

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 37.

¹⁰⁶ E. Ashtor, “L’inquisition dans l’état mamlouk,” *RSO* 25 (1950), 14, my translation.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 17, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Jazāri, BN MS, 302–3; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 168; Ibn Kathīr, 14/38, 75, 101; Ibn Rajab, 2/21; Nu’aymī, 1/97–8.

nothing beyond that they occurred. Evidence on them is scarce both because there were no records kept by officially constituted bodies and because the losers in general left behind few surviving accounts of any kind. There is no alternative to observing these events from the perspective of the learned elites who wrote the literary sources.

Of the fitnas over belief cited by the sources, only in fitnas involving Ḥanbalīs do we have accounts from both sides. In spite of the fame of great Ḥanbalī scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qudāma, the madhhabs situation in the city was insecure. In theory, each of the four madhhabs tolerated the doctrines of the others. In practice, however, Ḥanbalī positions on theological issues varied from those of others to the extent that conflict was latent in their relations. On the issues of the created character of the Qur’ān, the visitation of tombs, and the divine attributes, the Ḥanbalīs of Damascus espoused doctrines that were fundamentally incompatible with the beliefs of the Shāfi‘īs and often the other madhhabs as well. Examples of the suspect status of the Ḥanbalīs appear frequently in the sources. Some Damascenes rejected the claim of the Ḥanbalīs to be Muslims.¹⁰⁹ One waqf for a madrasa specified that “no Jew, Christian, Magian, or Ḥanbalī enter” it.¹¹⁰ Shāfi‘īs who controlled madrasas in at least one instance tried to keep Ḥanbalīs from entering or benefiting from them.¹¹¹

Yet in spite of strong doctrinal differences, Ḥanbalīs were by and large immune from persecution for their beliefs. When a fitna over theological issues broke out between Ḥanbalīs and others, the sources usually attributed a social dimension to it. One reason for the conflict between Ḥanbalīs and others was the recent arrival of many Ḥanbalīs in the city. Ḥanbalīs included immigrants who had fled Mongols and Crusaders in the Jazīra and Palestine, in addition to arrivals from the region around Damascus.¹¹² Some of the established a‘yān of the city resented the Ḥanbalīs as outsiders. Once in the city, Ḥanbalī immigrants clashed with Shāfi‘ī elites, especially the Banū Zākī and the Banū Asākir. The conflict between newcomers and established households provided the context and often the direct cause of the theological fitnas between Ḥanbalīs and others.

One arena of this conflict was the Umayyad Mosque, the use of which Ḥanbalīs disputed with the Shāfi‘ī a‘yān. A fitna over the use of the Umayyad Mosque produced an accusation of unbelief against ‘Abd al-Ghanī Ibn Qudāma, one of the most prominent Ḥanbalīs in the city. The two protagonists were the Banū Asākir, one of the most noted Shāfi‘ī families in the city, and a group of Ḥanbalīs that included ‘Abd al-Ghanī, a member of a noted household that arrived in Damascus from Palestine fleeing crusaders. We have accounts from both parties. Abū Shāma, himself a Shāfi‘ī who was an admirer of Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn Asākir, wrote that the “ignorant” among the Ḥanbalīs hated the Banū Asākir because they were the a‘yān of the Shāfi‘ī ‘ulamā’. This

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 69. ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Dhahabī, *Mukhtaṣar . . . al-Jazārī*, Köp. MS, 26.
¹¹¹ Yūnīnī, 2/337. ¹¹² Pouzet, *Damas*, 80–105.

hatred was supposedly so intense that Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn ‘Asākir feared walking through the Mosque for fear that the Ḥanbalīs “would commit some sin.”¹¹³

The Ḥanbalī Ibn Rajab interpreted the fitna differently. In his account, the cause of the conflict was the envy (*hasd*) of the Shāfi‘ī a‘yān for ‘Abd al-Ġānī Ibn Qudāma. One of the Banū ‘Asākir supposedly insulted ‘Abd al-Ġānī, and was beaten up in revenge by a group of Ḥanbalīs. Ibn Rajab related that the victim proceeded to the governor and complained that the Ḥanbalīs “wanted fitna.” An audience was then convened to discuss the issue, at which the governor, “understanding nothing,” ordered that the pulpit (*minbar*) of Ibn Qudāma and the Ḥanbalī library in the Mosque be destroyed. According to Ibn Rajab, the Shāfi‘īs intended to expel all madhhabs but their own from the Umayyad Mosque, and it was only by protecting their area of the mosque with soldiers (*jund*) that the Ḥanafīs kept their chamber (*maqṣūra*) from being destroyed as well.¹¹⁴

All accounts agree that Ibn Qudāma himself was accused of anthropomorphism. A majlis was held for him, at which he responded with the standard Ḥanbalī theological positions. Finally he left the city before a fatwā authorizing his death was drafted, and died in Cairo before he could be repatriated.¹¹⁵ This was one of the major fitnas in the period, and writers agreed that the reason for it was competition between new immigrants and older elites over the use of the mosque and the dominance of Shāfi‘ī a‘yān in the city.

The sources also attributed the accusations of unbelief directed against Ibn Taymiyya to fitna. Of the six occasions on which he was jailed, five were caused by friction between him and factions of the a‘yān of Damascus and Cairo.¹¹⁶ One resulted from an alliance between the sultān and his supporters in Cairo and a number of a‘yān families in Damascus. Ibn Taymiyya was known as an opponent of Sultān Baybars al-Jāshnikīr and of his powerful shaykh al-Manbijī. Ibn Taymiyya criticized both openly, saying at one point of al-Jāshnikīr that “his day has passed and his leadership has come to an end.”¹¹⁷ This incited Manbijī’s enmity (*‘adāwa*), and soon afterwards some of his supporters requested the governor in Damascus to persecute Ibn Taymiyya. This began Ibn Taymiyya’s long series of tribulations. Describing one of the later persecutions, Ibn Kathīr attributed Ibn Taymiyya’s imprisonment in Alexandria to a scheme by Manbijī to use his relatives there to murder him. When Qalāwūn prevailed over Baybars al-Jāshnikīr, he apparently expected that Ibn Taymiyya would want to take revenge against Manbijī’s partisans. He

¹¹³ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 138; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 18/235; Ibn Shākir, *Fawāt*, 2/290.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Rajab, 2/20, 21. See also Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS. 4; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirāt*, 8/521, 522.

¹¹⁵ On fitnas surrounding ‘Abd al-Ġānī Ibn Qudāma see Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS. 4; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirāt*, 8/521, 522; Ibn Kathīr, 13/20, 21, 39; Ibn Rajab, 2/20–5; Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 46–7.

¹¹⁶ D. Little, “The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya,” *IJMES* 4 (1973), 311–27. Little is less interested in the social than the historiographical issues raised by Ibn Taymiyya’s jailings, and follows other scholars in seeing the fitnas surrounding him as inspired by the state: 312–13.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Kathīr, 14/49: “zālāt ayyāmuḥu wa’ntahat riyāsatuhu wa-qaruba’ inqidā’ ajlih.”

asked Ibn Taymiyya for a fatwā authorizing their execution, but Ibn Taymiyya refused.¹¹⁸ In spite of this refusal, the scholarly factions associated with Jāshnikīr continued to work against him. In the year after Qalāwūn's death these groups and others moved against Ibn Taymiyya again.

The a'yān fought out many of their conflicts over belief without bringing in ruling groups. When Ibn al-Wakil made a play for the mansab at the Adhrā'wiyya madrasa, his opponents made a case against him by accusing him of unbelief and immorality. He escaped execution at the hands of his own madhhab by seeking the aid of the Ḥanbali chief qādī.¹¹⁹ In the case of a follower of al-Bājirīqī, killed in 741/1340–1 for "major sins in speech (azā'īm minā'l-qawl)," an audience was held in the hall of justice (dār al-'adl) in the palace (dār al-su'āda). The audience was attended by the a'yān and the qādīs of all the madhhabs but the Shāfi'īs, but there is no record of the presence of amīrs. Accused of claiming divinity, deprecating the prophets, and associating with skeptics, the accused insulted the qādīs present, who condemned and then killed him forthwith. The trial and killing supposedly went against the wishes of both the governor and the Shāfi'ī qādī, neither of whom was present.¹²⁰ In this as in other cases, heresy was not suppressed by a legally constituted body with a defined sphere of jurisdiction; it rather shows how power was always the prize of a never-ending competition that brought in many groups.¹²¹

What these examples illustrate is that the suppression of heresy was not carried out by any sovereign or legally constituted state or corporate body, but was rather one dimension of the fitna that was the inescapable environment of elite social life. Ashtor believed that sultāns and governors often took the initiative in suppressing heresy. His evidence for this is inadequate and largely from the later Mamlūk period, which he did not distinguish from earlier times. Ruling groups in the high medieval period were generally reluctant to interfere in scholarly fitnas, in spite of the attempts of scholars to enlist them. Only a few rulers and governors ever tried to enforce a set of doctrines, and these attempts did not last.¹²²

On the contrary, instead of enforcing orthodoxy, amīrs, governors, and sultāns generally suppressed fitnas over belief when they broke out. One such event occurred in 636/1238–9, when a fitna broke out between Ḥanbalīs and Ḥanafīs in the Umayyad Mosque, where each group had a separate area for prayer. Al-Malik al-Kāmil attributed the fitna to the fact that each group had its own khaṭīb, and ordered them thereafter to pray behind a single khaṭīb.¹²³ Another example was the fitna of 705/1305–6, which broke out at a time when

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14/54. ¹¹⁹ Nuṣaymī, 1/305. ¹²⁰ Ibn Ḥajar, 2/441–2; Ibn Kathīr, 14/189–90.

¹²¹ See Ibn Kathīr, 14/53, 54, 56, 58, 65; Dhahabī, *Kitāb al-'ibar*, 341–2; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/18–22; also Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 65b, 65a, for the Mālikī chief qādī Ahmad Ibn Yasin al-Riyāḥī (d. 764) who beheaded a number of Damascenes for unbelief before being chased out of the city, and repeated what he had done there in both Cairo and Aleppo.

¹²² See attempts by al-Malik al-Mu'azzam and al-Malik al-Ashraf to ban the rational sciences. Al-Azīz wanted to expel the Ḥanbalīs from Cairo but never carried it out: Ibn Kathīr, 13/18.

¹²³ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 166.

the governor was absent from the city. He quelled the fitna when he returned by ordering that none of the ‘ulamā’ discourse on questions of belief, on penalty of forfeit of life and property.¹²⁴ Still another theological fitna between Ḥanbalīs and Shāfi‘īs in 716/1316–17 ended when the governor Tankiz summoned both parties and forced them to make peace.¹²⁵ For a final example, when a group of scholars (jamā‘a mina’l-fuqahā’) summoned Ibn Taymiyya to question him about his *Aqīda al-Hamawīyya* an amīr beat some of them to quiet the situation.¹²⁶ In these cases rulers and governors sought to quell fitna rather than suppress “heresy.”¹²⁷

Rarely in fitnas over belief did ruling groups take action unbidden. A‘yān determined to silence others enlisted rulers, amīrs, and other powerful men in their struggles.¹²⁸ When the Mālikī qādī attacked Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ba‘labbākī for his positions on a number of theological issues, he brought him before the sultān, then the governor, before he jailed and beat him himself.¹²⁹ When Ibn Taymiyya wished to punish a Christian accused of blaspheming the Prophet, he and another shaykh approached the governor and asked permission to proceed.¹³⁰ In another instance, Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī asked al-Mu‘azzam why he revoked the authority of a shaykh to deliver fatwās, and was told that a group of scholars had written him requesting that he do so, because of the shaykh’s bad character and the mistakes in his fatwās.¹³¹ This was also true in the cases of the trials of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qudāma, both of whom were attacked by groups of scholars who persuaded rulers to take action against them. The “state” thus had no specialized agencies capable of acting independently. The a‘yān silenced one another through the same diffuse practices by which they contested other social and political prizes.

Shaykhs approached rulers especially to silence others through violence. While in some incidents shaykhs killed people without bringing in rulers, in others the a‘yān hesitated to act on their own.¹³² In 712/1312–13, Ibn Zahra al-Maghribī, who “discoursed” in al-Kallāsa (on what we do not know), incited the ire of a group of the learned. In a petition to the governor they accused Ibn Zahra of deprecating the Qur‘ān and the ‘ulamā’, then brought Ibn Zahra to the dār al-‘adl where he capitulated and saved himself.¹³³ An

¹²⁴ Nu‘aymī, 1/97–8; Ibn Kathīr, 14/37; Birzālī, *al-Muqtafā li-tā’rikh al-shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Shāma*, 2 vols. Topkapisaray, Ahmad III MS 2951, year 705; Ṣafadī, A‘yān, 635b.

¹²⁵ Ibn Kathīr, 14/75–6. ¹²⁶ Ibn Kathīr, 14/4.

¹²⁷ For another example of the “taskin” or quelling of fitna over belief see Jazarī, BN MS, 237. See also chapter 1, note 32.

¹²⁸ For examples of scholars attacked by other scholars through ruling groups, and forbidden from delivering fatwās or silenced, see Ibn Rajab, 2/21; Ibn Shākir, Vat. Ar. MS, 91; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāt*, 8/696; Ibn Kathīr, 14/123; Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/22; Jazarī, Köp. MS, 103, 493; Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi, Köp. MS, 131. ¹²⁹ Jazarī, Köp. MS, 495.

¹³⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 13/335–6. ¹³¹ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Miṣāt*, 8/710.

¹³² See for example Aḥmad al-Rūsī, executed in 714/1314–15 by the Mālikī qādī for licentiousness, deprecating the Qur‘ān and ḥadīth, and laxity in his religious duties: Ibn Kathīr, 14/74. Another qādī, ‘Alī al-Bakrī, was almost killed by the sultān for his readiness to execute people for irreligion, but was instead exiled and forbidden from discoursing or giving fatwās: Ibn Kathīr, 14/70. Some among the ‘ulamā’ planned to execute a shaykh for mistakes in his fatwās, but he was saved by the governor: Ibn Kathīr, 14/35. ¹³³ Ibn Kathīr, 14/66.

episode in Cairo in 704/1304–5 illustrates the absence of formal agencies and procedures in that city too. A Christian who converted to Islam and then apostatized was taken before the sultān. When the Christian refused to reconvert, the learned parties involved debated what to do with him, and failed to come to a decision. One group then brought the man to a madrasa and decided there to kill him, whereupon they paraded his head about on a spear to show “what Islamic justice (*al-‘adl al-islāmī*) ordered in his case.”¹³⁴

By including members of ruling groups in their struggles against one another, the a‘yān were also able to make use of their instruments of coercion and communication. When Ibn Zahra was punished, he was whipped, then seated backwards on a mule, with his head uncovered, and led about the city with the heralds calling out: “This is someone who discourses on ‘ilm without true knowledge (*ma‘rifa*).” When Ibn Taymiyya’s opponents persecuted him for a creedal statement (*‘aqīda*) he had written, they sent the criers around the city to proclaim its falsity.¹³⁵ These were not state bodies; they were rather groups of the a‘yān who made use of rulers’ resources of coercion and communication. The same holds largely true for the places in which these debates and examinations were held: there was no stable and specific location in which they were held. Without reliable control over instruments of violence, when shaykhs or qādīs composed fatwās authorizing the killing of an unbeliever they lacked the capacity to enforce them, especially when they did not have the body of the accused under their control. One example was the shaykh known as al-Ḥarīrī (d. 645/1247–8), accused of inciting passions for singing, dancing, and pederasty among the sons of the elite (*kubārā*) of the city. Several fatwās were issued calling for his death; however, Ḥarīrī proved to be untouchable, and these fatwās were not carried out.¹³⁶

Powerful men were often interested in the outcome of these competitions, although they did not necessarily take part in them. Those condemned to death could escape it if a powerful individual interceded on their behalf. In 737/1336–7 a Shāfi‘ī faqīh was summoned to an audience, accused of holding Qarmatī beliefs, and sentenced to death. Before he could be killed, a group of amīrs and a‘yān interceded, and he was spared.¹³⁷ But others without such influence suffered death before the very men who struggled to spare others. Such was the fate of Ibn al-Ḥaythamī, whose only claim to distinction was his residence in a madrasa and his memorization of a work in Shāfi‘ī fiqh. Accused of heresy, he had no patron to intercede on his behalf, and his execution was witnessed by the a‘yān of the city.¹³⁸ In fitna over belief as in fitna over manṣabs, intercession was one of the critical practices; and in both cases shaykhs made use of rulers for their own purposes.

We have also misunderstood fitnas over belief by treating them as trials before legally constituted bodies such as tribunals of inquisition. Just as the

¹³⁴ *Kitāb tārīkh al-salātīn wa al-‘asākir*, BN MS, 58–9.

¹³⁵ Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, 7/22.

¹³⁶ Abū Shāma, *Dhayl*, 180.

¹³⁷ Ibn Kathīr, 14/177. See *ibid.*, 14/70, for another person whose life was spared by the intercession of amīrs with the sultān.

¹³⁸ Ibn Kathīr, 14/122–3.

a‘yān acquired social capacity informally from individual shaykhs, there were no formal procedures for withdrawing it.¹³⁹ The silencing or censuring of individuals followed the same political forms as competitions over the manṣabs, and brought in similar groups of learned elites, lineages, ruling groups, and scholarly and political factions. As there were no specialized agencies for determining truth from error, there were no specialized procedures such as trials or inquisitions. The form the identification and suppression of error took was usually the debate, in which a powerful amīr or a group of scholars invited the object of their suspicion to debate with a shaykh in an audience before the a‘yān. This crossing of the procedures of the trial before a qādī with the debate among scholars raised inevitable ambiguities.¹⁴⁰ As the debate was the principal means by which heretics were tried, and the result of the debate could be the death of one party, the association of scholarly struggle with military violence was occasionally not just metaphor. Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī’s son took some pride that though his father “made war with his disputation (jadālihi), he never splattered with blood the sword-edge of his struggle.”¹⁴¹ As was the case in other forms of fitna, when participants in these contests made reference to an external set of rules, it was more often a weapon of social combat than a description of a formal procedure or mechanism.

The capacity to articulate truth and use violence in its defense was a reward of competitive struggle. It was acquired for a time, and was not held by virtue of a right, patent, or office. There was no sovereign or autonomous body capable of planning and carrying out long-term ideological strategies. Although many involved in such events were qādīs, the “suppression” of heresy did not take the form of an official trial but of fitna. When we encounter fatwās and debates dealing with the struggle to define truth, these were objects and instruments of political competition and not formal mechanisms or procedures. When the ruler or governor took part in these struggles, it was usually at the instigation of an outside group; and in any case his interest was usually in maintaining a balance between social peace and the satisfaction of the scholarly factions that supported him. In the case of “heresy,” as in the case of “education,” western scholars have formalized practices of social competition into social and institutional structures, but in fact there were no legally constituted or socially authorized agencies for determining the true from the false. The capacity to define and suppress heresy was a prize of fitna like other symbolic, social, and political prizes of the city.

¹³⁹ A shaykh could however revoke the authority of one of his disciples to discourse in public or to deliver fatwās. See for example the shaykh who, after criticizing Ibn Taymiyya, was banned from discoursing in public by his shaykhs: “anta lā tāhsan ‘an tatakallam”: Ibn Kathīr, 14/115.

¹⁴⁰ See for example one of Ibn Taymiyya’s interrogations, in which he complained that his opponent in debate was also his judge: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, Köp. MS, 71. See also the debate of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī with the learned of Aleppo, after which his opponents wrote a document demanding his execution: Ibn Abī Usaybi‘a, 642. See also Ibn Kathīr, 14/275 for the interrogation/debate in 762/1360–1 of a man who claimed that Pharaoh converted to Islam. Also *Kitāb tā’rīkh al-Salāṭīn wa al-‘asākir*, BN MS, 6r.

¹⁴¹ Subkī, Staatsbibliothek MS, 9.

Conclusion

Law, institutions, even knowledge itself cannot be thought of as formal domains. They were rather simultaneously instruments and arenas of a never-ending struggle for social power and status. No contest over the right to represent truth was without a social dimension that gave it a point. By the same token, few competitions among the *a'yān* and against others were imagined in terms of naked interest without bringing in the fundamental structuring values of truth/falsity, legality/illegality (*halāl*/*ḥarām*), and purity/pollution. It is difficult to discern a purely political or social dimension within cultural conflicts, or a cultural dimension within political and social conflict, because truth and interest interpenetrated one another.

The competition over the capacity to determine the legal from the unlawful and the true from the false took the forms of other types of competition in the city. The learned elite struggled to keep the right to represent *'ilm* within a single group. They also used their control over *'ilm* to struggle against one another and against others. But they did not possess institutional means of limiting to a small number the socially recognized capacity to articulate truth through degrees, certification, or ordainment. Even the social power of *qādīs* was not that of an elite with state or corporate instruments of coercion behind them. Rather, “capacity” was the temporary reward of struggle by individuals and their groups against others. These struggles took many forms and were played out in many fields.

Summary

“In an era of upheaval,” writes Charles Maier of a similarly resourceful elite, “it is continuity and stability that need explanation.”¹ In this study I have tried to identify some of the practices by which the elite of a medieval Middle Eastern city acquired power, resources, and prestige, and reproduced their status in time. One of the principal aims of the study has been to question the often uncritical application to the medieval Middle East of the concepts and methods of European social history. The social history of structures, agencies, and formal processes and routines, constructed from original documents, appeared in Europe answering to particular European social imperatives. It was partly (though not entirely) through such mechanisms that individuals, lineages, and groups in Europe struggled for power, property, and prestige, and passed them on to their descendants. These historiographical practices have been well applied to societies such as Sung China where formal institutions and well-defined social bodies had roles that to Europeans were familiar or made sense. In the cases of Sung China and the Latin West, scholars have been able to identify (and identify with) a familiar principle of legitimate “order.” The transposition of either principle to the medieval Middle East works only by positing the continuous “corruption” of the order we have sought to find.

High medieval Syria, however, together with much of the medieval Middle East, was not a society of specialized institutions, state agencies, or of well-defined corporate bodies. Power in all its aspects was relatively undifferentiated, because it was mainly the household and not the agency or public body that held power, and held it in most of its social, political, and economic aspects. As we have seen, because of the nature of political power in the period, elites could not make use of autonomous corporate bodies or state agencies in their strategies of social reproduction. The institutions, groups, and structures historians have studied were little more than aspects of a larger set of practices.

Western scholars may no longer see sultāns and amīrs as kings and barons; but still they often conjure up an image of Europe in the medieval Middle East.

¹ C.S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, 1975), 3.

It is only by assuming the existence of the structures they analyze that Western scholars have found “systems of education,” “colleges,” “inquisitions,” “the government,” and “schools.” In each case, scholars have taken practices by which elites competed with one another as evidence for permanent structures and agencies. Scholars have often recognized that these institutions did not regulate social competition as might be expected. But in general this realization has not led them to question the existence of the “systems” they analyze. Rather, they have often seen departures from them as one of two things: an “informal” analogue or a “corruption” of the “system.” This is why the period has seemed both “personal” and “disorderly.” However, as we have seen, constant unregulated competition over status, power, and revenue sources was the a‘yān’s inescapable environment.

There was no “system” of education, patronage, appointment, or of government. Damascus did not have agencies, autonomous social bodies, or institutions with the power to organize such systems. Rather, Damascus and its revenue sources are better viewed as arenas for competitive practices of political and social struggle. These practices were somewhat restrained by commonly held values and expectations; but they were nonetheless carried out without sovereign or autonomous entities to regulate them. When we formalize practices used in social and political competition into entities such as schools, tribunals of inquisition, systems of education, and the state we may miss many of the critical practices of the city. As we have seen, even the distinctions between the realms of the “political” and the “social” or the “public” and the “private” reads modern relations between state and society into a medieval past that cannot sustain such a clear-cut division.

In the case of the implantation of madrasas in the city, what appear to be specialized institutions were in fact instruments and objects of two separate struggles. To the households of amīrs and a few wealthy civilians, madrasas represented one strategy for the long-term control of property. When members of elite households founded madrasas, they sought to benefit from them as household waqfs. To the a‘yān madrasas constituted another arena, in which manṣabs became prizes of their own struggles. However, as we have seen, madrasas did not create or train an institutional elite, still less a bureaucratic one. They were not the means by which the state trained its cadres or by which civilian elites transmitted social and cultural capital to their descendants. Instead, to the civilian elite, madrasas represented manṣabs, residences, and spaces in which they interacted. There is no doubt that many who used madrasas experienced them as important religious institutions, but we will mistake the intersection between the transmission of knowledge and the foundation of household waqfs if we study them as the constitution of a new form of higher education.

In Damascus it is difficult to speak of specialized education at all, much less of a “system of education,” formal or otherwise. There was no evidence of specialized training in schools, nor was there any form of specialized culture

that could be acquired only through formal institutions. The transmission of knowledge did not belong exclusively either to schools or to the period of youth. The primary form of higher culture was one of knowledge production, of wide dissemination, into which the young were initiated; taking it as a whole, as a “system of education,” mistakes how the *a'yān* acquired knowledge and made use of it throughout their lifetimes. This is also (parenthetically) true of the transmission of knowledge in many Muslim groups today in the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

The *a'yān* did not seek to reproduce their status through equipping their descendants with formal qualifications. Rather, in addition to learning law and other fields, they wanted their young to master ritual practices and an often innovative style of deportment and manners. The bonds created by interactions with their shaykhs and others in the ritualized environment of the production of knowledge forged this elite’s useful intimacies. Their social and cultural capital – as they themselves expressed it – became the dominant currency in *fitna*, both in their struggles for *mansabs* and in their rivalries for eminence more generally. It is by interpreting the strategies by which they acquired their distinction that historians might break free of paradigms they distrust but are reluctant to abandon.

Once we look for practices and strategies rather than institutions and rules, at the strategic rather than the taxonomic, we are in a much better position to exploit the records that medieval Damascenes composed and preserved. This study has suggested that it is the biographical dictionary rather than archive that constituted the main repository of their critical practices of social survival. The concepts of right, capacity, entitlement, or exemption, whether natural, legal, or divine, are conveyed by the title, charter, degree, or deed, and Damascenes had few of these. Instead, they contested their social prizes through competitive performance of a mass of emblems and signs associated with *ilm*, and on these topics the biographical dictionaries carry masses of information. As with elites of other societies they brandished the past to secure their futures, but what they invoked was neither deed nor title but their memories of their shaykhs. These humble, elusive, and “formulaic” sources not only preserved the memory of the individuals through whom cultural prestige passed. As the useful past, they were also archives of the practices by which households survived over time.

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